SHOGAKUKAN

復讐を誓った人々

史記

横山光輝

2

CHINESE HISTORY[SHIKI]

MITSUTERU YOKOYAMA PRESENTS

BIG GOLD COMICS

史記 2 横山光輝 MITSUTERU YOKOYAMA PRESENTS CHINESE HISTORY SHIKI

小学館

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BIG GOLD COMICS

CHINESE HISTORY[SHIKI]

BIG GOLD COMICS
ビッグゴールド・コミックス
博愛の人①……ジョージ秋山
妖怪博士の朝食①……水木しげる
平成野球草子①～②……水島新司
ケースハード①……松本零士
アトンの娘①……里中満智子
迷路のない町……齋藤なずな

王の屍に鞭打つ…!!　祖国の王によって理不尽に殺害された父と兄の仇を討つべく、呉に与し、大国・楚を相手に戦い抜いた伍子胥!!
臥薪嘗胆…!!　越に殺された父王の恨みを忘れまいと、寝床に薪を敷いて臥した呉の夫差!!　一度は夫差に屈して下僕となり、苦い胆を嘗めてはその屈辱を忘れまいとした越の句践!!
そして復讐心に燃える男たちが激突した呉越の決戦へ…!!
『ビッグゴールド』誌で人気連載中の横山『史記』、待望の第2巻!!

横山光輝

MITSUTERU YOKOYAMA PROFILE

昭和29年に「音無しの剣」でデビュー。「鉄人28号」「おてんば天使」「伊賀の影丸」等で不動の地位を確立する。昭和42年より「水滸伝」を連載、さらに昭和46年からライフワークともいえる「三国志」の連載を開始する。「バビル2世」「時の行者」等、SFの傑作も多い。「史記」は、古代中国史全体を見極めようとする新しいライフワークだ。

SHOGAKUKAN

覇業を誓った人々

史記

横山光輝

2

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BIG GOLD COMICS

SHIJI, RECORDS OF THE GRAND HISTORIAN

VOLUME 2: REVENGE-SEEKERS

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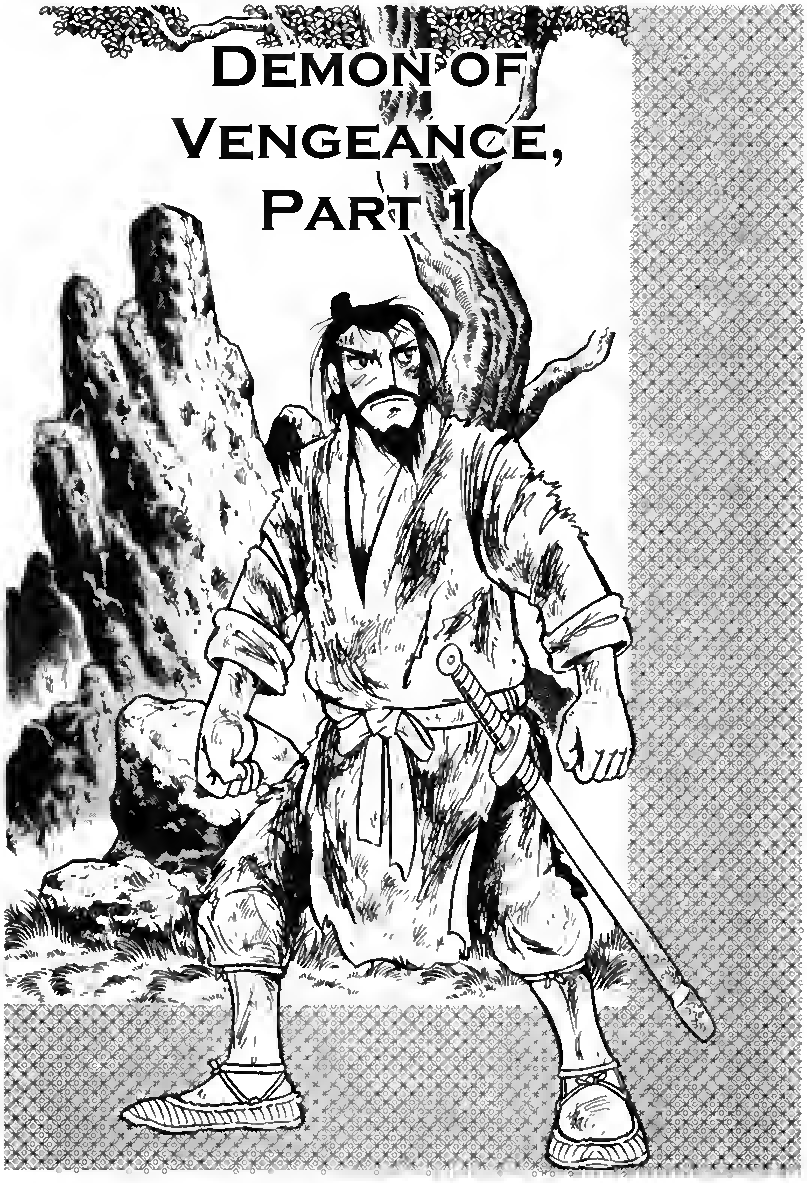
Ch. 3 Tasting Gallbladder

Ch. 4 Fall of Wu

Chapter 1

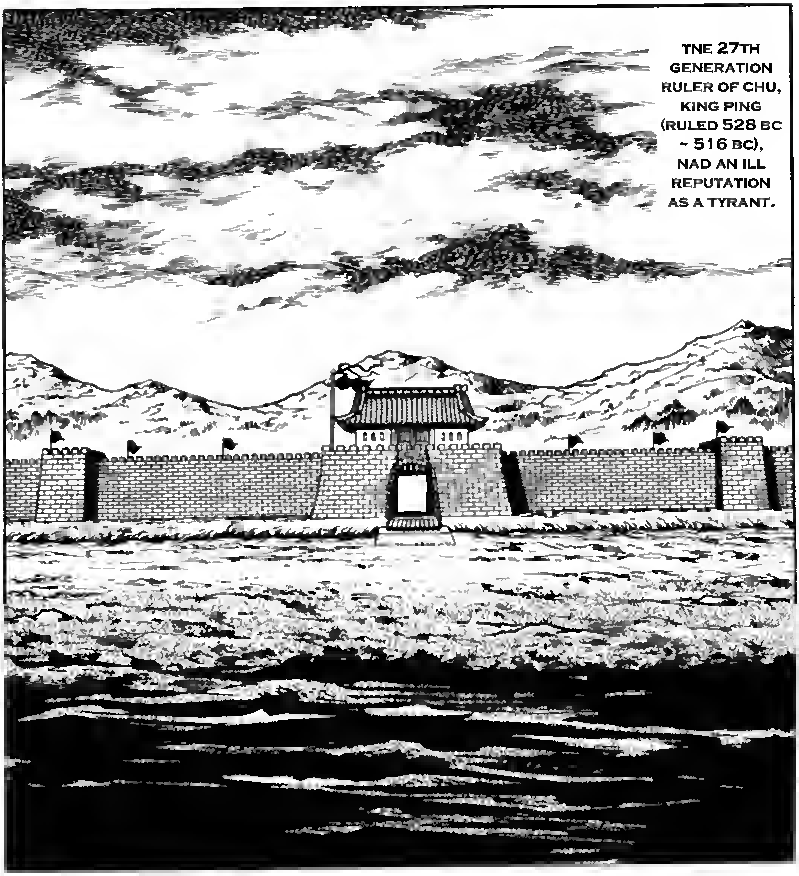
Demon of Vengeance, Part 1



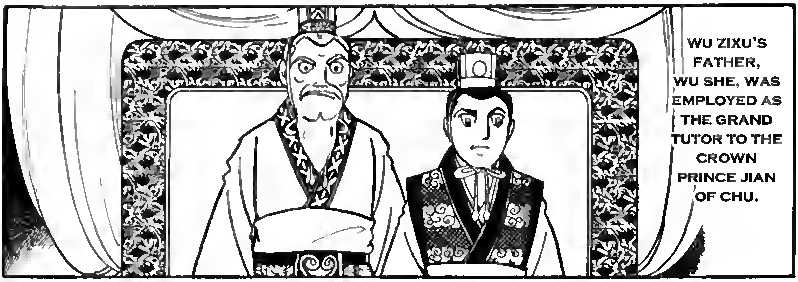
IN THE SPRING AND AUTUMN PERIOD,
THERE WAS ONCE A MAN CONSUMED
BY THIRST FOR VENGEANCE UPON
AN ENTIRE KINGDOM.

HIS NAME WAS YUN, COURTESY NAME
ZIXU, AND HE BELONGED TO THE
RENOWNED WU FAMILY IN THE
KINGDOM OF CHU.

THIS IS HIS STORY,
THE REVENGE OF WU ZIXU.



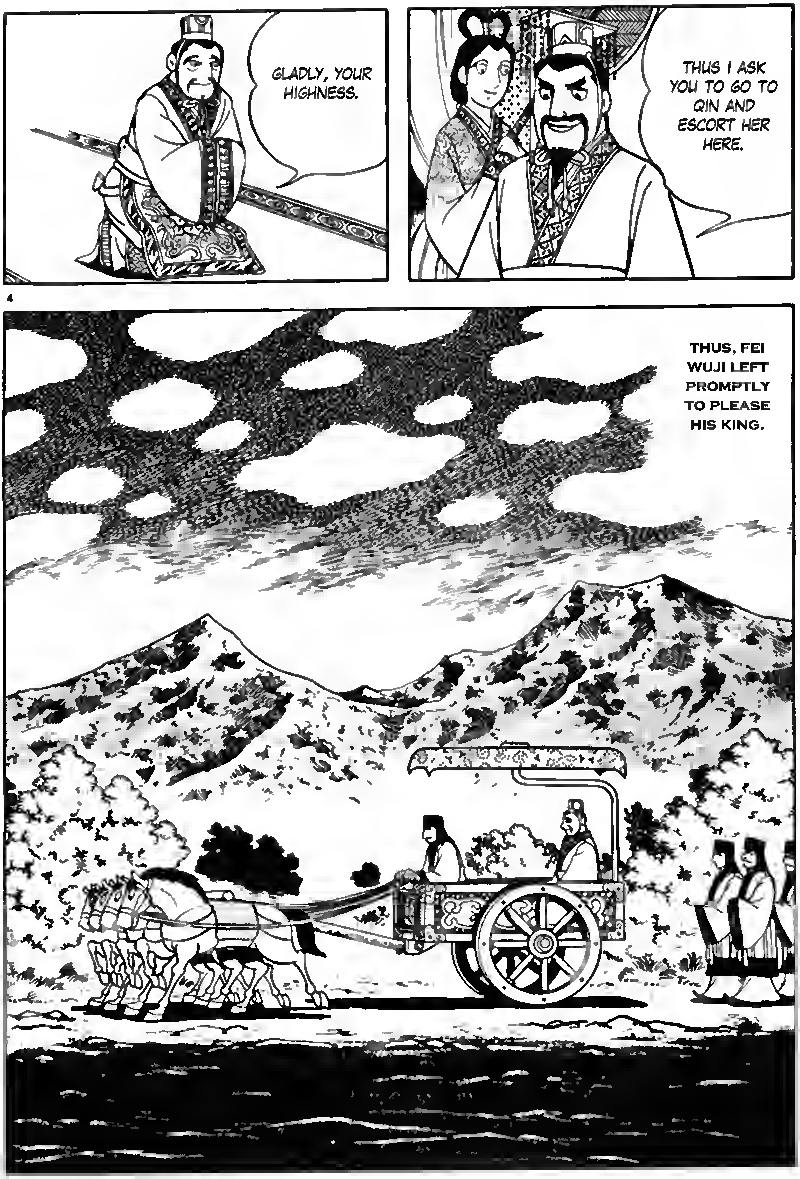
*TRADITIONAL CHINESE NAMES ARE OFTEN COMPOSED OF A "PERSONAL NAME" AND "COURTESY NAME." THE PERSONAL NAME IS A CHILDHOOD NAME WHILE THE COURTESY NAME IS GIVEN WHEN A MAN BECOMES 20.

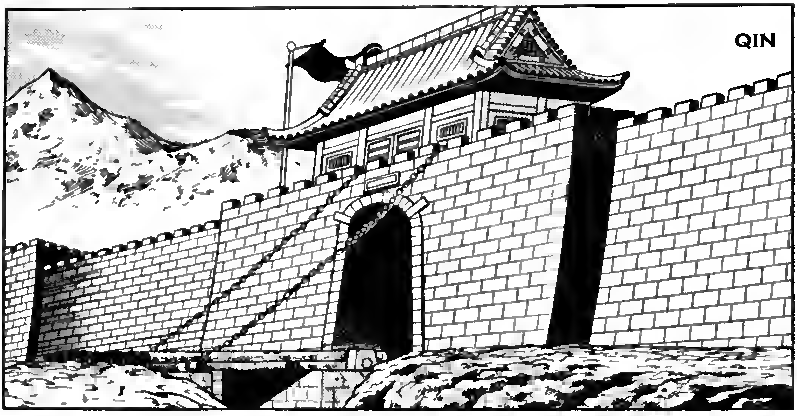

WU ZIXU'S FATHER, WU SHE, WAS EMPLOYED AS THE GRAND TUTOR TO THE CROWN PRINCE JIAN OF CHU.

MEANWHILE HIS SUBORDINATE, FEI WUJI, WAS THE JUNIOR TUTOR. FEI WUJI HARBOURED A STRONG AMBITION TO RISE UP HIGHER BY WORMING CLOSER TO KING PING OF CHU.

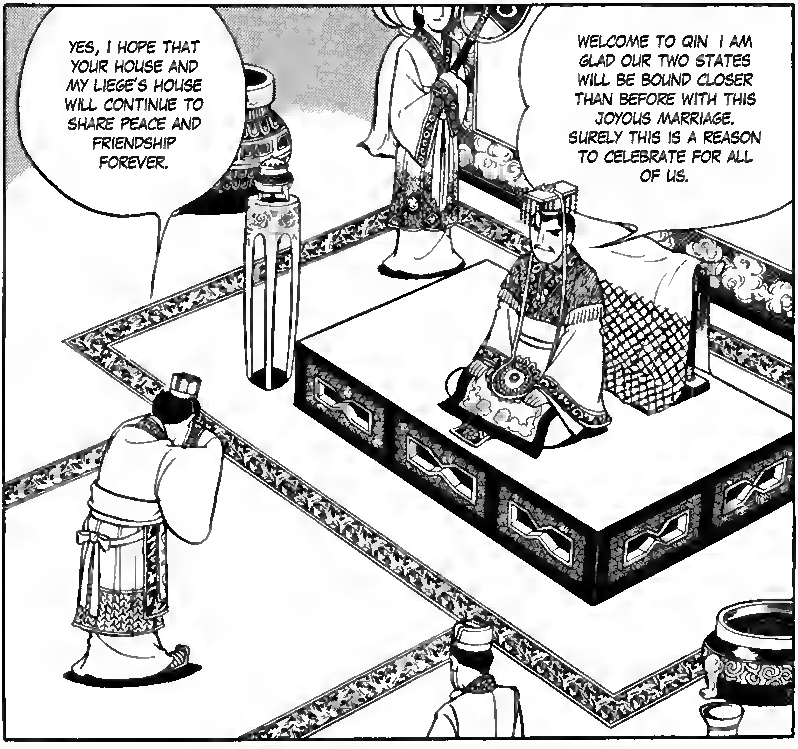
3

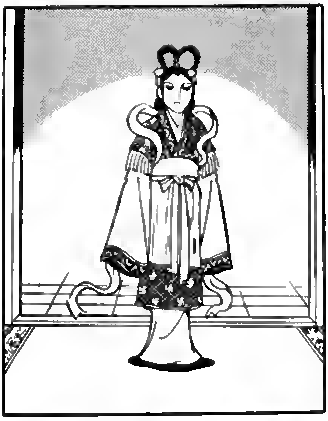
THAT IS EXCELLENT NEWS.
FEI WUJI, I HAVE SUCCESSFULLY ARRANGED THE CROWN PRINCE'S MARRIAGE WITH A QIN PRINCESS.

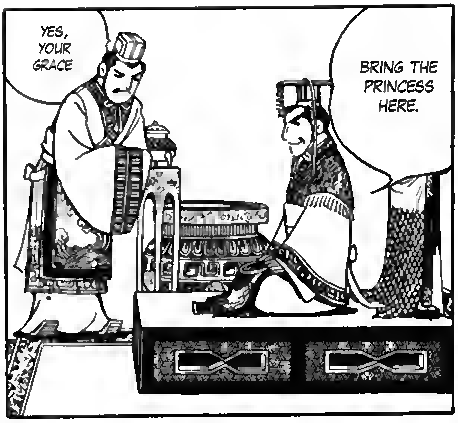

GLADLY, YOUR HIGHNESS.
THUS I ASK YOU TO GO TO QIN AND ESCORT HER HERE.
4
THUS, FEI WUJI LEFT PROMPTLY TO PLEASE HIS KING.


QIN

5


WELCOME TO QIN. I AM GLAD OUR TWO STATES WILL BE BOUND CLOSER THAN BEFORE WITH THIS JOYOUS MARRIAGE. SURELY THIS IS A REASON TO CELEBRATE FOR ALL OF US.
YES, I HOPE THAT YOUR HOUSE AND MY LIEGE'S HOUSE WILL CONTINUE TO SHARE PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP FOREVER.



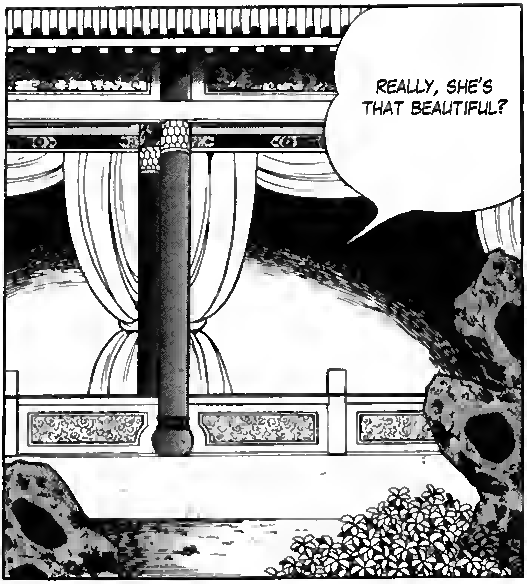

YES, YOUR GRACE
BRING THE PRINCESS HERE.

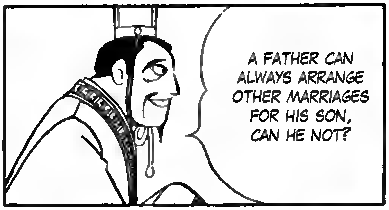
HOW STUNNING...

6

UPON SEEING THE PRINCESS' BEAUTY, FEI WUJI HATCHED A PLAN TO WED HER TO KING PING INSTEAD.

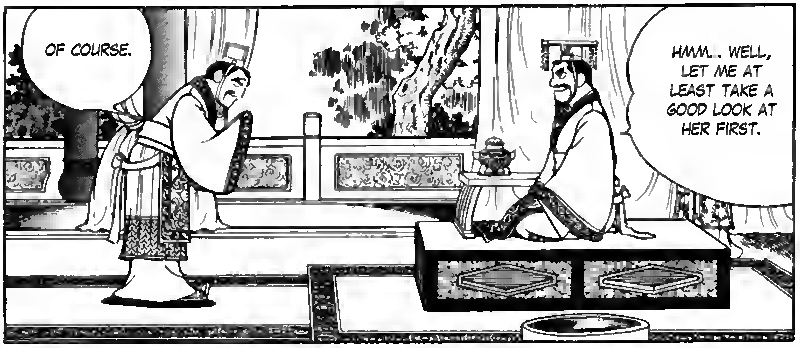
YES, SO MUCH SO THAT I DARE SUGGEST ONLY A KING SHOULD ENJOY SUCH BEAUTY..


REALLY, SHE'S THAT BEAUTIFUL?


A FATHER CAN ALWAYS ARRANGE OTHER MARRIAGES FOR HIS SON, CAN HE NOT?

BUT, PRINCE JIAN WOULD SURELY COMPLAIN.

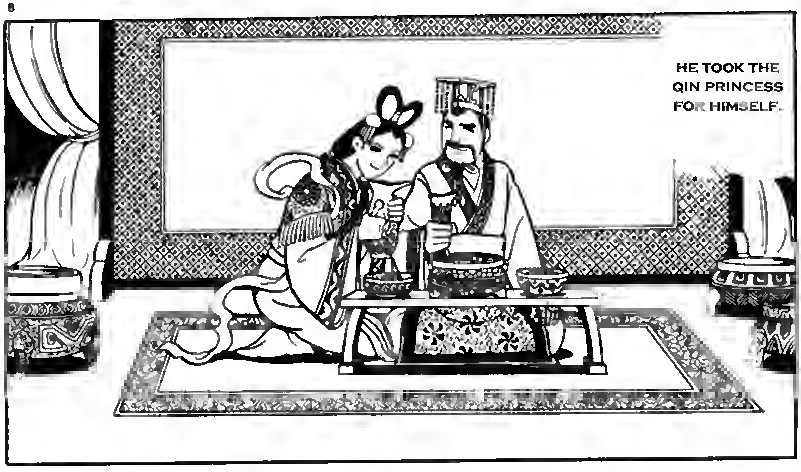
7


OF COURSE.
HMM.. WELL, LET ME AT LEAST TAKE A GOOD LOOK AT HER FIRST.

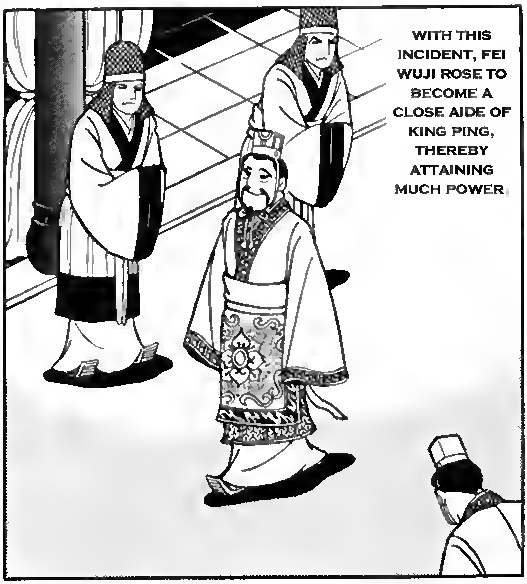
AS FEI WUJI EXPECTED, THE KING FELL IN LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT.

THUS, AFTER ARRANGING ANOTHER BRIDE FOR HIS CROWN PRINCE,

8


HE TOOK THE QIN PRINCESS FOR HIMSELF.

HOWEVER, HE NOW HAO A MAJOR PROBLEM WHILE HE EARNED THE TRUST OF KING PING, HE HAD ALIENATED CROWN PRINCED JIAN, WHICH DID NOT BODE WELL SHOULD KING PING PASS AWAY.



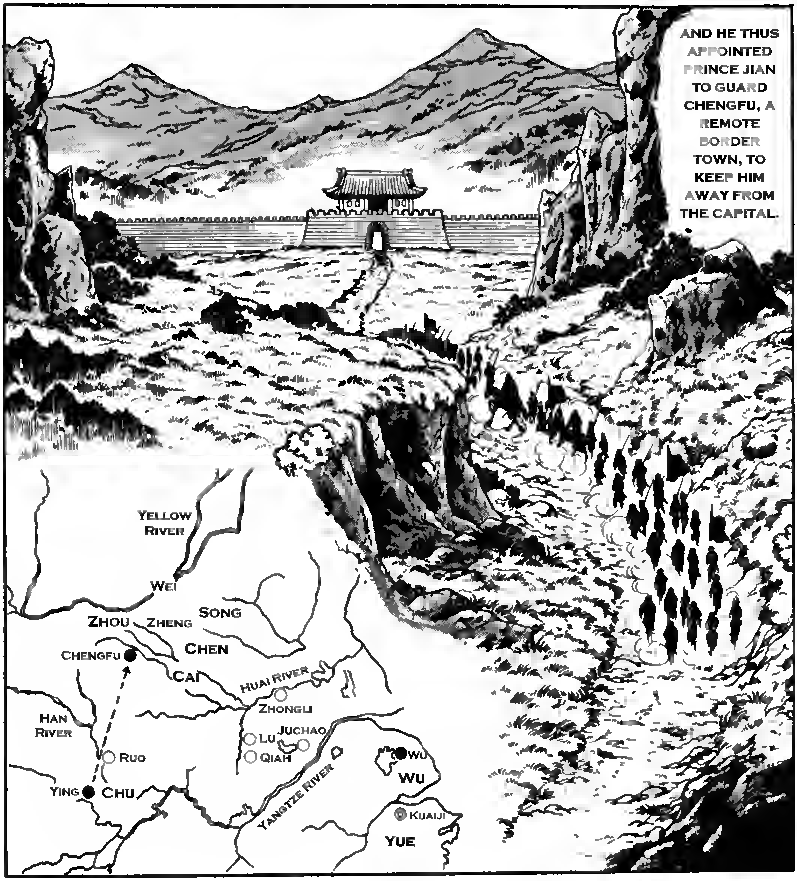
WITH THIS INCIDENT, FEI WUJI ROSE TO BECOME A CLOSE AIDE OF KING PING, THEREBY ATTAINING MUCH POWER.

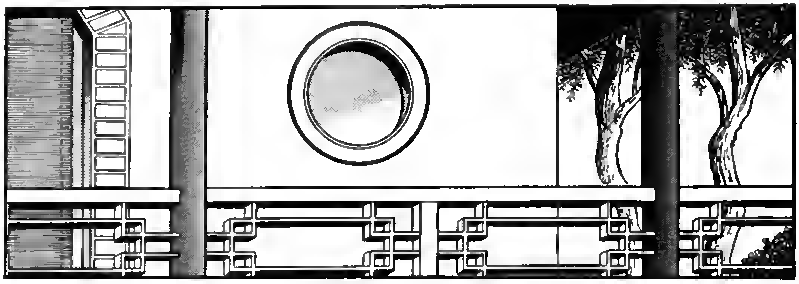
9

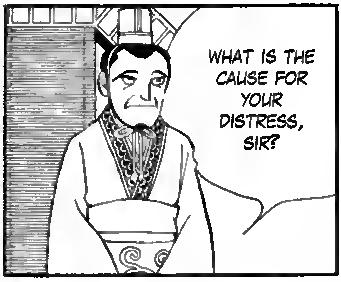
THUS, HE PLOTTED TO DISINHERIT PRINCE JIAN BY FREQUENTLY BADMOUTHING HIM TO THE KING.

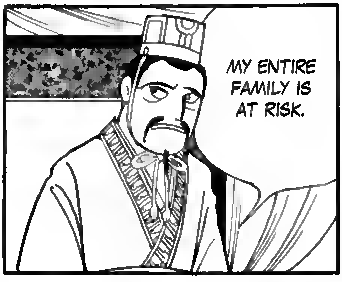
GRADUALLY, KING PING BECAME RESENTFUL OF HIS SON,

10


AND HE THUS APPOINTED PRINCE JIAN TO GUARD CHENGFU, A REMOTE BORDER TOWN, TO KEEP HIM AWAY FROM THE CAPITAL.
YELLOW RIVER
WEI
ZHOU
ZHENG
SONG
CHEN
CAI
CHENGFU
HUAI RIVER
ZHONGLI
HAN RIVER
JUCHAO
LU
QIAN
RUO
YING
CHU
WU
WU
YANGTZE RIVER
KUAIJI
YUE

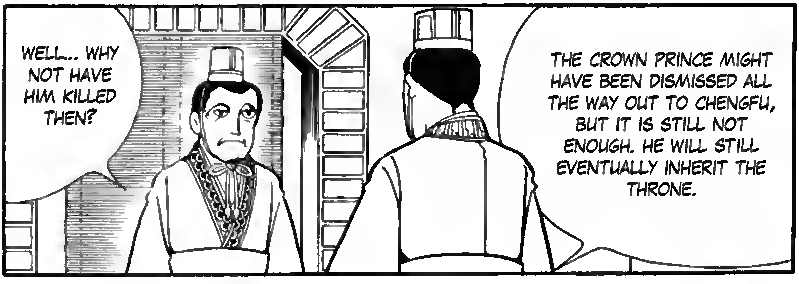



WHAT IS THE CAUSE FOR YOUR DISTRESS, SIR?

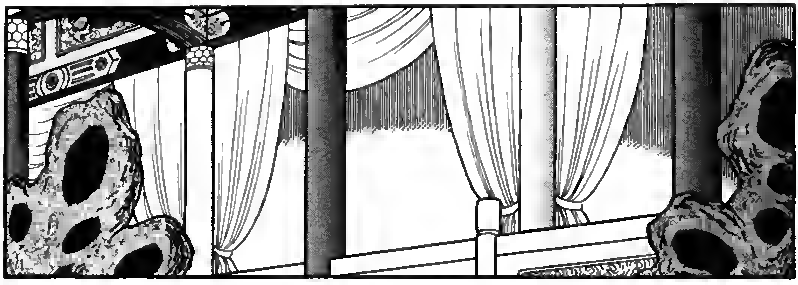

MY ENTIRE FAMILY IS AT RISK.

NOT GOOD... THIS IS NOT GOOD AT ALL...

11


WELL... WHY NOT HAVE HIM KILLED THEN?
THE CROWN PRINCE MIGHT HAVE BEEN DISMISSED ALL THE WAY OUT TO CHENGFU, BUT IT IS STILL NOT ENOUGH. HE WILL STILL EVENTUALLY INHERIT THE THRONE.

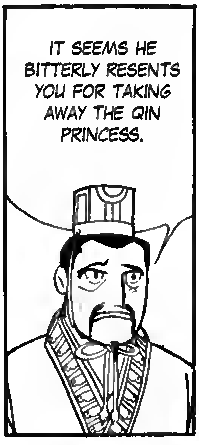
IF YOU WERE TO ACCUSE HIM OF PLOTTING REBELLION, I'M SURE THE KING WILL GLADLY SUPPORT YOU IN EXECUTING HIM.
KILL HIM...!? THE CROWN PRINCE HAS AN ARMY OF HIS OWN. HE'S NOT SOMEONE I CAN KILL SO EASILY.
JUST FEED HIM SOME PLAUSIBLE REASONS AND PLAY TO THE KING'S FEAR.
IF PRINCE JIAN IS REMOVED, THEN YOUR POSITION WILL BE SECURE NO MATTER WHO BECOMES THE NEXT KING OF CHU.
EXCELLENT IDEA! THE KING DOES TRUST ME HIGHLY, AFTER ALL.
12
HAHAHA! THAT WILL BE A LOAD OFF MY SHOULDERS!



YES, THAT IS WHAT MY TRUSTED SOURCES SAY.
WHAT!? PRINCE JIAN IS PLOTTING A REBELLION!?

13

I EVEN HEAR HE'S BEEN IN SECRET CONTACT WITH NEIGHBOURING DUKES SINCE YOU SENT HIM TO CHENGFU.

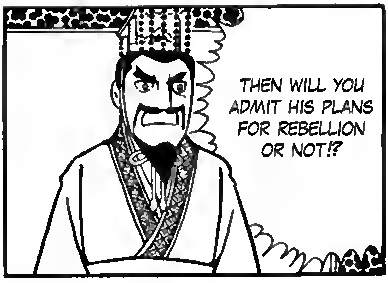

IT SEEMS HE BITTERLY RESENTS YOU FOR TAKING AWAY THE QIN PRINCESS.

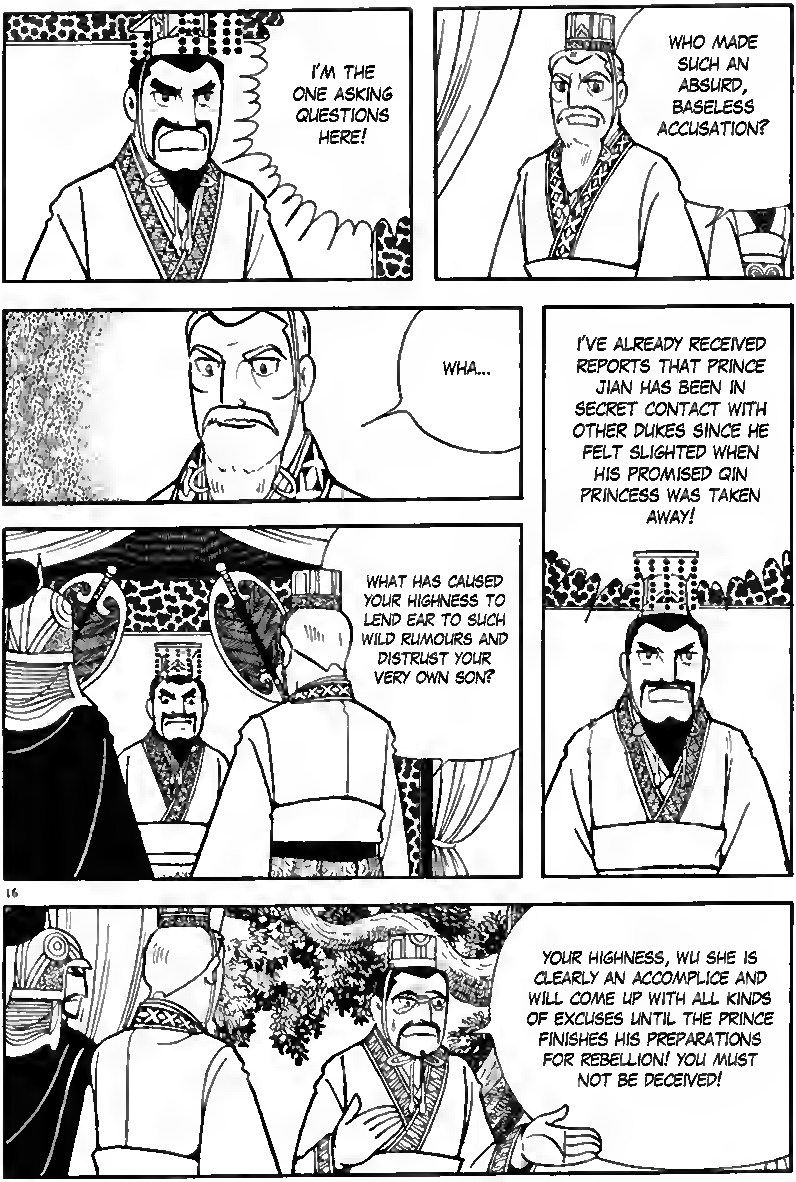
HE'S CLEARLY PLANNING ON ATTRACTING THEIR SUPPORT FOR HIS BID TO OUST YOU FROM THE CHU THRONE.
TRUE...
THE CROWN PRINCE HAS THE ARMY UNDER HIS COMMAND. YOU MUST REMAIN ON YOUR GUARD.
HMM... TO THINK TAKING THE QIN PRINCESS WOULD LEAD TO SOMETHING AS DRASTIC AS THIS...
14
YES, YOUR HIGHNESS.
SUMMON THE CROWN PRINCE'S GRAND TUTOR WU SHE AND ARMY DIRECTOR FENGYANG FROM CHENGFU AT ONCE SO I CAN INTERROGATE THEM!

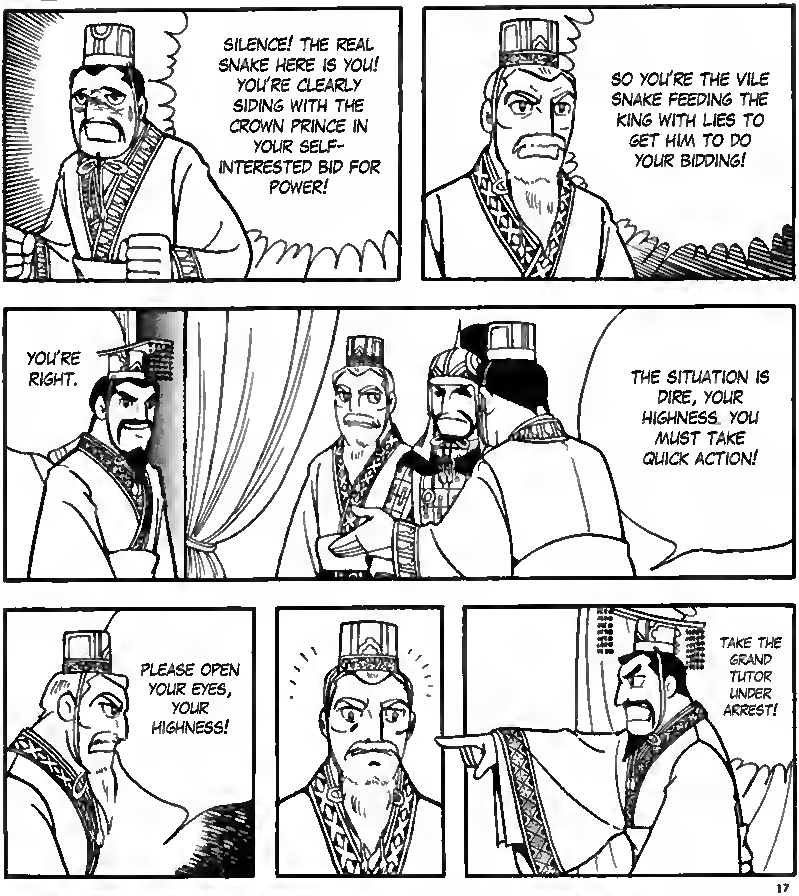
YES, YOUR HIGHNESS.
WU SHE, AS THE CROWN PRINCE'S GRAND TUTOR, YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS UPBRINGING, CORRECT?

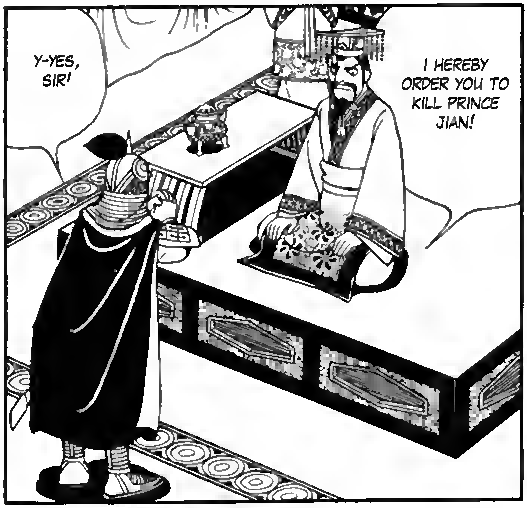
15

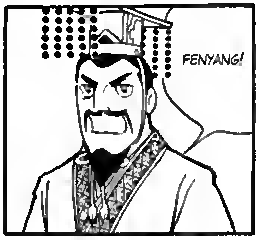
REBEL? THE PRINCE...?


THEN WILL YOU ADMIT HIS PLANS FOR REBELLION OR NOT!?


I'M THE ONE ASKING QUESTIONS HERE!
WHO MADE SUCH AN ABSURD, BASELESS ACCUSATION?
WHA...
I'VE ALREADY RECEIVED REPORTS THAT PRINCE JIAN HAS BEEN IN SECRET CONTACT WITH OTHER DUKES SINCE HE FELT SLIGHTED WHEN HIS PROMISED QIN PRINCESS WAS TAKEN AWAY!
WHAT HAS CAUSED YOUR HIGHNESS TO LEND EAR TO SUCH WILD RUMOURS AND DISTRUST YOUR VERY OWN SON?
16
YOUR HIGHNESS, WU SHE IS CLEARLY AN ACCOMPLICE AND WILL COME UP WITH ALL KINDS OF EXCUSES UNTIL THE PRINCE FINISHES HIS PREPARATIONS FOR REBELLION! YOU MUST NOT BE DECEIVED!


SILENCE! THE REAL SNAKE HERE IS YOU! YOU'RE CLEARLY SIDING WITH THE CROWN PRINCE IN YOUR SELF-INTERESTED BID FOR POWER!
SO YOU'RE THE VILE SNAKE FEEDING THE KING WITH LIES TO GET HIM TO DO YOUR BIDDING!
YOU'RE RIGHT.
THE SITUATION IS DIRE, YOUR HIGHNESS. YOU MUST TAKE QUICK ACTION!
PLEASE OPEN YOUR EYES, YOUR HIGHNESS!
TAKE THE GRAND TUTOR UNDER ARREST!
17
WE ARE SIMPLY FOLLOWING ORDERS, SIR.
LOCK HIM UP, GUARDS!

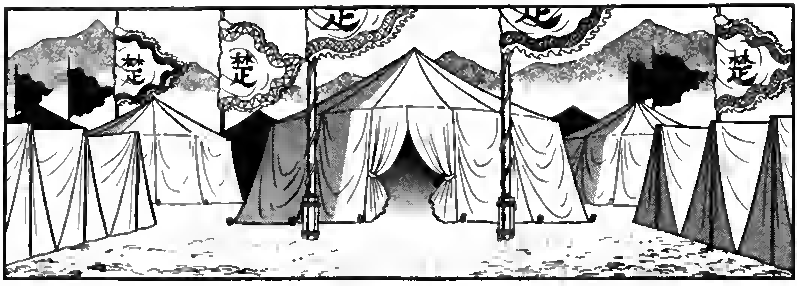

Y-YES, SIR!
I HEREBY ORDER YOU TO KILL PRINCE JIAN!


FENYANG!

Y-YES. ?

18

THUS, FENYANG MARCHED TO CHENGFU AT THE HEAD OF AN ARMY
楚
楚
楚


楚
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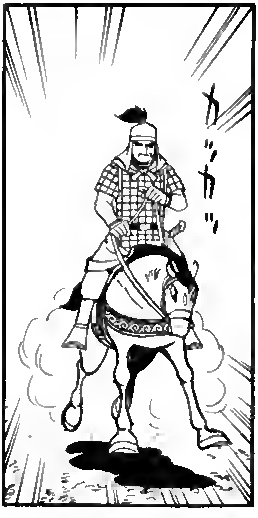
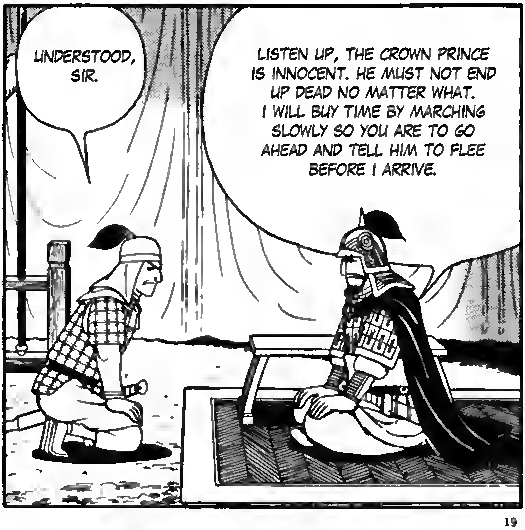
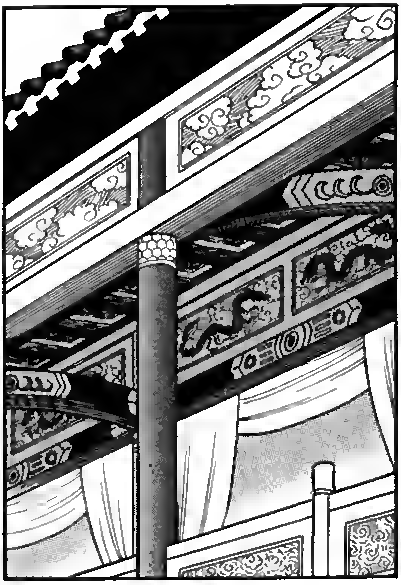



UNDERSTOOD, SIR.
LISTEN UP, THE CROWN PRINCE IS INNOCENT. HE MUST NOT END UP DEAD NO MATTER WHAT. I WILL BUY TIME BY MARCHING SLOWLY SO YOU ARE TO GO AHEAD AND TELL HIM TO FLEE BEFORE I ARRIVE.

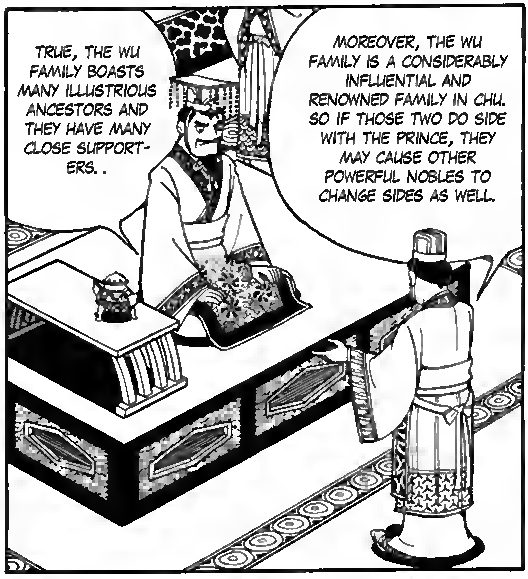
19

UNFORTUNATELY, HE WOULD LATER END UP KILLED WHEN CAUGHT UP IN A CONFLICT BETWEEN ZHENG AND JIN.
UPON RECEIVING FENYANG'S WARNING, PRINCE JIAN FLED TO SONG

YES, HE'D APPARENTLY FLED TO SONG BY THE TIME FENYANG REACHED CHENGFU.
THE PRINCE ESCAPED!?

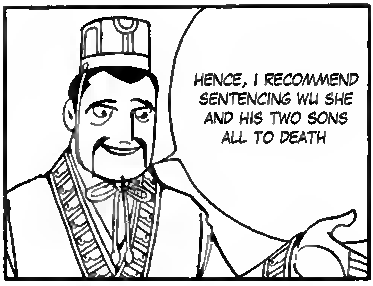


20


TRUE, THE WU FAMILY BOASTS MANY ILLUSTRIOUS ANCESTORS AND THEY HAVE MANY CLOSE SUPPORTERS. .
MOREOVER, THE WU FAMILY IS A CONSIDERABLY INFLUENTIAL AND RENOWNED FAMILY IN CHU. SO IF THOSE TWO DO SIDE WITH THE PRINCE, THEY MAY CAUSE OTHER POWERFUL NOBLES TO CHANGE SIDES AS WELL.

THERE IS, HOWEVER, STILL THE PROBLEM OF WU SHE YOU MUST DEAL WITH. HE HAS TWO TALENTED SONS, SHANG AND ZIXU. I FEAR THEY MAY AID THE PRINCE IN HIS TREACHEROUS PLOT IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

YES, BUT HIS SONS ARE STILL IN CHENGFU RIGHT NOW.


HENCE, I RECOMMEND SENTENCING WU SHE AND HIS TWO SONS ALL TO DEATH

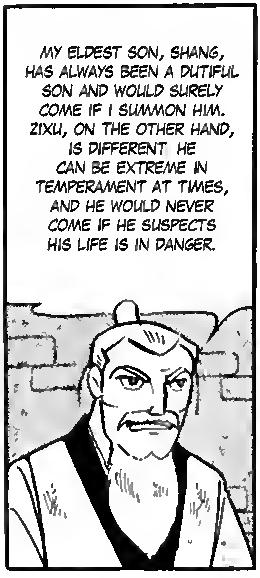
GOOD IDEA.
SIMPLY FORCE WU SHE TO SUMMON HIS SONS HERE TO THE CAPITAL. HIS FILIAL SONS WILL SURELY NOT DISOBEY THEIR FATHER'S CALLING. ONCE THEY ARRIVE, IT WILL BE ALL TOO SIMPLE TO KILL THEM.

21

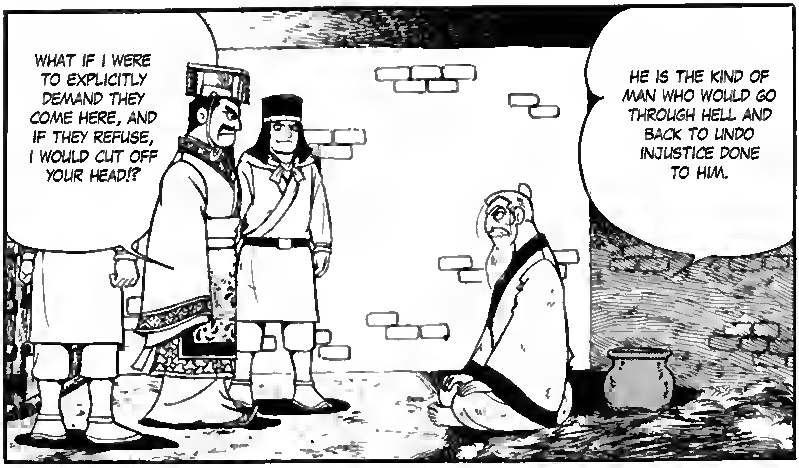
LET US CARRY OUT THE PLAN AT ONCE THEN.

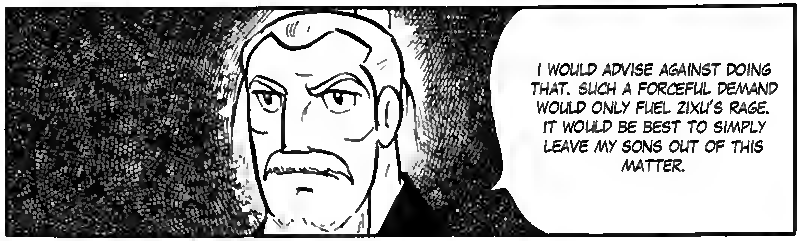
HIS HIGHNESS IS HERE TO SEE YOU.

22


MY ELDEST SON, SHANG, HAS ALWAYS BEEN A DUTIFUL SON AND WOULD SURELY COME IF I SUMMON HIM. ZIXU, ON THE OTHER HAND, IS DIFFERENT. HE CAN BE EXTREME IN TEMPERAMENT AT TIMES, AND HE WOULD NEVER COME IF HE SUSPECTS HIS LIFE IS IN DANGER.

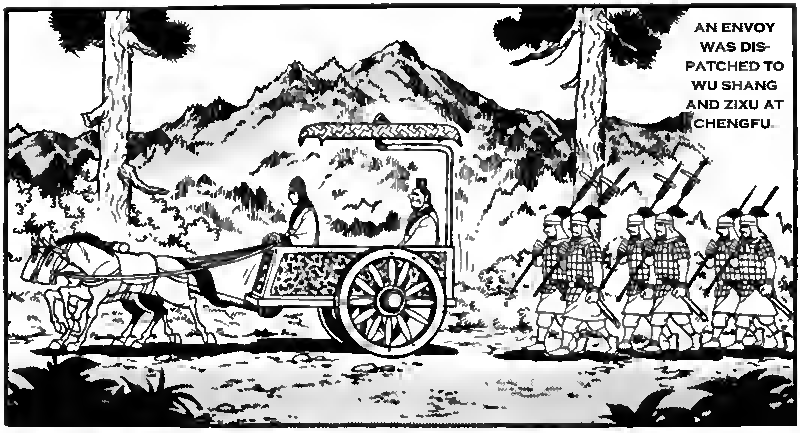
WU SHE, I ORDER YOU TO SUMMON YOUR TWO SONS. IF YOU COMPLY, I WILL SPARE YOUR LIFE. IF YOU REFUSE, YOU WILL BE PROMPTLY PUT TO DEATH.


WHAT IF I WERE TO EXPLICITLY DEMAND THEY COME HERE, AND IF THEY REFUSE, I WOULD CUT OFF YOUR HEAD!?
HE IS THE KIND OF MAN WHO WOULD GO THROUGH HELL AND BACK TO UNDO INJUSTICE DONE TO HIM.

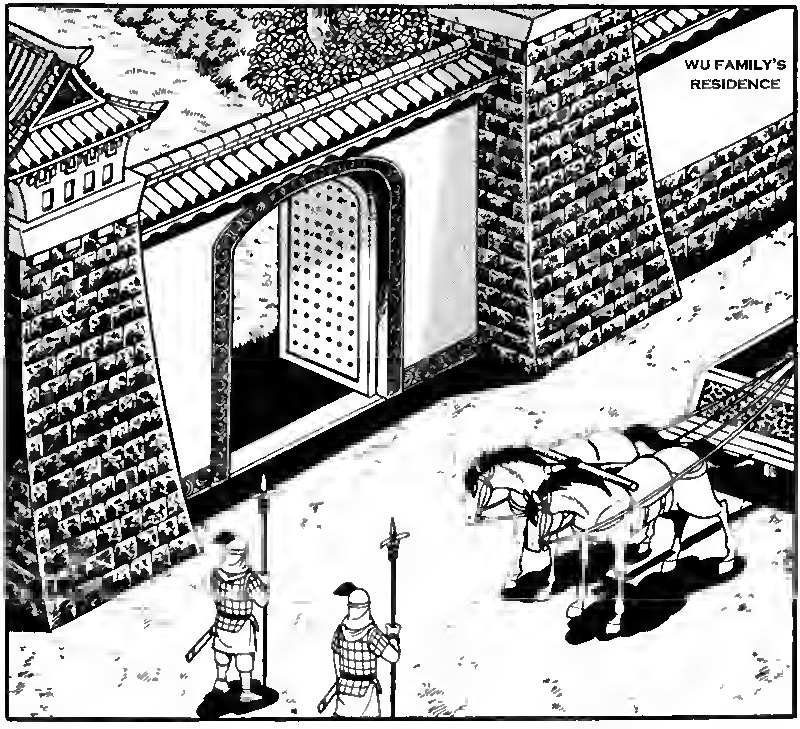

I WOULD ADVISE AGAINST DOING THAT. SUCH A FORCEFUL DEMAND WOULD ONLY FUEL ZIXU'S RAGE. IT WOULD BE BEST TO SIMPLY LEAVE MY SONS OUT OF THIS MATTER.

23

VERY WELL, DO AS YOU WISH. IT WILL BE UP TO MY SONS TO DECIDE.
ABSOLUTELY NOT. YOUR FAMILY HAS TOO GREAT AN INFLUENCE, EVEN OUTSIDE CHU.

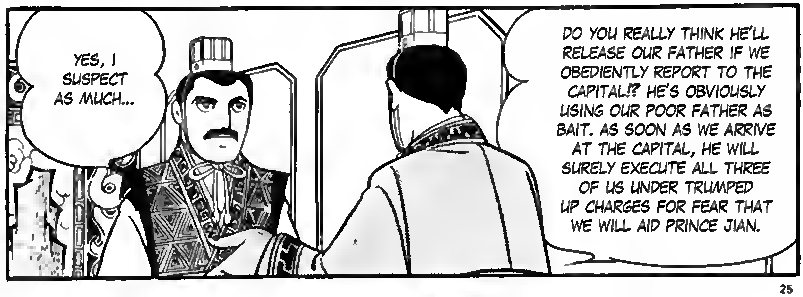

AN ENVOY WAS DISPATCHED TO WU SHANG AND ZIXU AT CHENGFU.

24

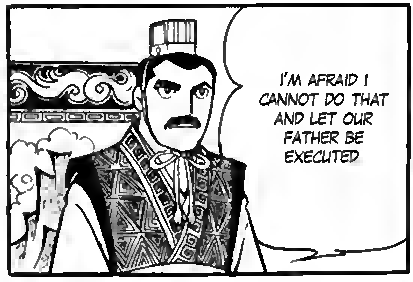

WU FAMILY'S RESIDENCE

HE DEMANDS WE REPORT TO THE CAPITAL AT ONCE. OTHERWISE, OUR FATHER WILL BE EXECUTED...!
WHAT DID THE KING WRITE, BROTHER?

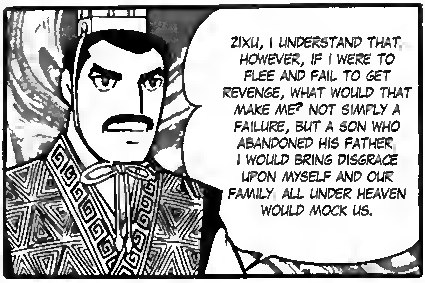
THIS IS CLEARLY A TRAP!

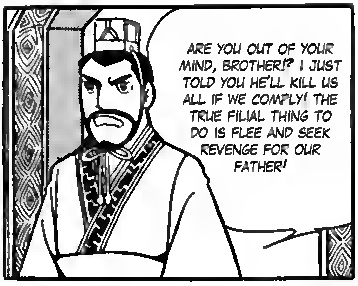

YES, I SUSPECT AS MUCH...
DO YOU REALLY THINK HE'LL RELEASE OUR FATHER IF WE OBEDIENTLY REPORT TO THE CAPITAL!? HE'S OBVIOUSLY USING OUR POOR FATHER AS BAIT. AS SOON AS WE ARRIVE AT THE CAPITAL, HE WILL SURELY EXECUTE ALL THREE OF US UNDER TRUMPED UP CHARGES FOR FEAR THAT WE WILL AID PRINCE JIAN.

25

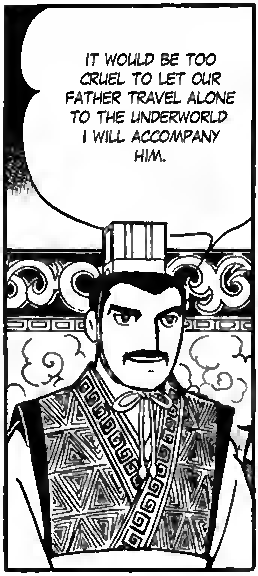

I'M AFRAID I CANNOT DO THAT AND LET OUR FATHER BE EXECUTED

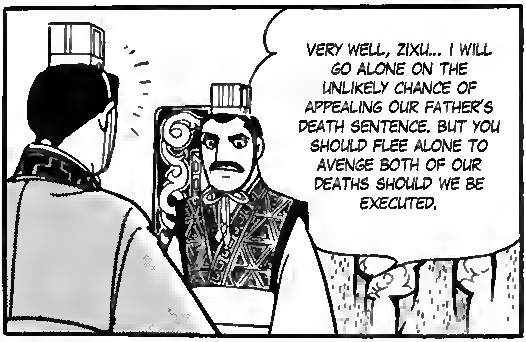
THEN WE MUST FLEE CHU AT ONCE! THERE IS NO POINT IN DYING A MEANINGLESS DEATH HERE.


ZIXU, I UNDERSTAND THAT. HOWEVER, IF I WERE TO FLEE AND FAIL TO GET REVENGE, WHAT WOULD THAT MAKE ME? NOT SIMPLY A FAILURE, BUT A SON WHO ABANDONED HIS FATHER. I WOULD BRING DISGRACE UPON MYSELF AND OUR FAMILY. ALL UNDER HEAVEN WOULD MOCK US.


ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR MIND, BROTHER!? I JUST TOLD YOU HE'LL KILL US ALL IF WE COMPLY! THE TRUE FILIAL THING TO DO IS FLEE AND SEEK REVENGE FOR OUR FATHER!

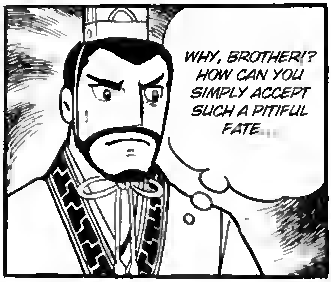
SO YOU WOULD SIMPLY DANCE RIGHT INTO THE KING'S TRAP AND DIE!? I, FOR ONE, REFUSE TO DIE LIKE A FOOL!
OUR FAMILY HAS ALWAYS PUT ITS HONOUR ABOVE ALL. THINK OF THE SHAME WE WOULD BRING UPON OUR FATHER IF NEITHER OF HIS SONS SHOWED UP TO AT LEAST TRY AND SAVE HIS LIFE.


IT WOULD BE TOO CRUEL TO LET OUR FATHER TRAVEL ALONE TO THE UNDERWORLD I WILL ACCOMPANY HIM.


VERY WELL, ZIXU... I WILL GO ALONE ON THE UNLIKELY CHANCE OF APPEALING OUR FATHER'S DEATH SENTENCE. BUT YOU SHOULD FLEE ALONE TO AVENGE BOTH OF OUR DEATHS SHOULD WE BE EXECUTED.

YOU STILL REFUSE TO CHANGE YOUR MIND, BROTHER...!?

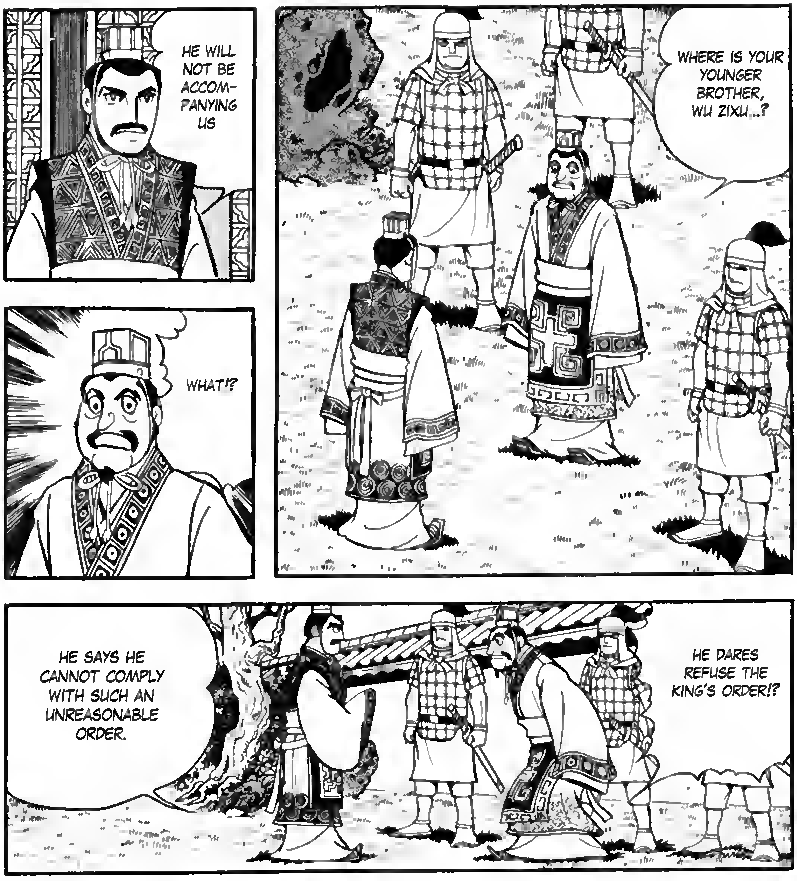
UNDERSTAND THAT YOU ARE NOW UP AGAINST THE KING OF CHU HIMSELF. IF YOU TRULY INTEND ON SEEKING REVENGE, THE ROAD AHEAD OF YOU WILL BE PAINFUL, PERHAPS EVEN MORESO THAN DEATH ITSELF.


WHY, BROTHER!? HOW CAN YOU SIMPLY ACCEPT SUCH A PITIFUL FATE...

BROTHER SHANG..
I WISH YOU THE BEST, ZIXU...

27

MY APOLOGIES FOR KEEPING YOU WAITING


HE WILL NOT BE ACCOMPANYING US
WHERE IS YOUR YOUNGER BROTHER, WU ZIXU...?
WHAT!?
HE SAYS HE CANNOT COMPLY WITH SUCH AN UNREASONABLE ORDER.
HE DARES REFUSE THE KING'S ORDER!?
GUARDS! ARREST HIM BY FORCE!
NGHHH...! I CANNOT ALLOW SUCH IMPUDENCE!

ヒュン

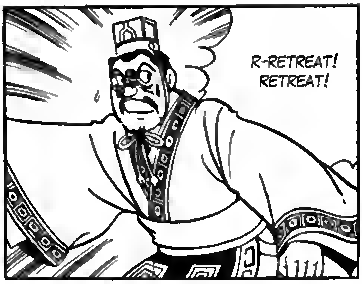
TAKE ONE MORE STEP AND THAT'LL BE THE END OF YOUR LIFE! I SUGGEST YOU WITHDRAW QUIETLY!

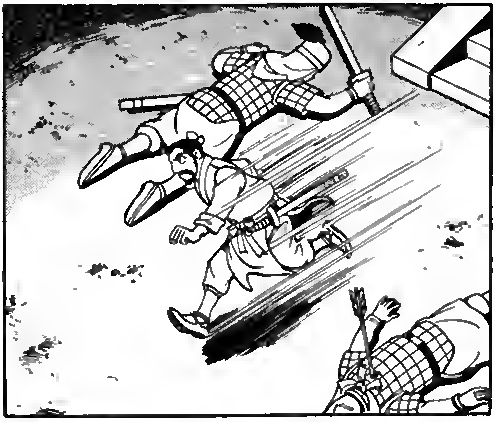
29

A TYRANNICAL KING WHO EXECUTES THE VIRTUOUS WHILE LENDING AN EAR TO CORRUPT TOADIES HAS NO RESPECTABLE AUTHORITY TO SPEAK OF!

YOU DARE RAISE ARMS AGAINST THE KING'S ENVOY!?

DON'T JUST STAND THERE! ARREST HIM!
I WON'T HOLD BACK!
ヒュン
ヒュン
30
GAHHH!
YOU'RE NEXT!

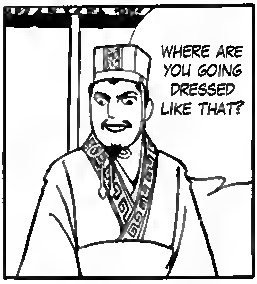


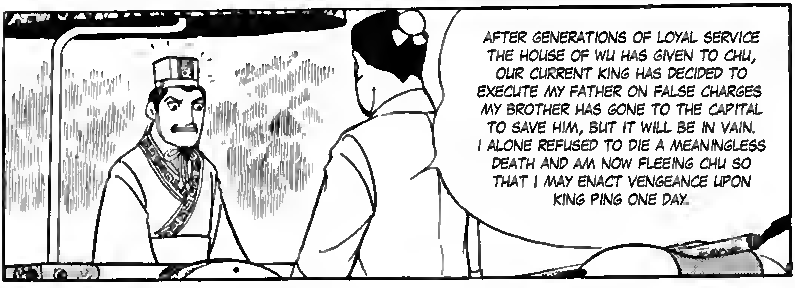


31

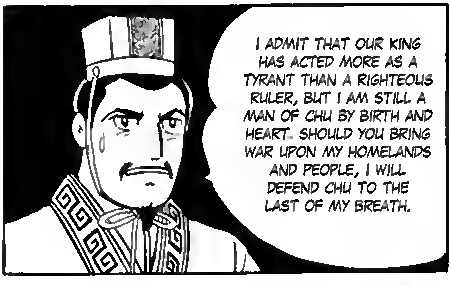
HELLO, SHEN BAOXU.

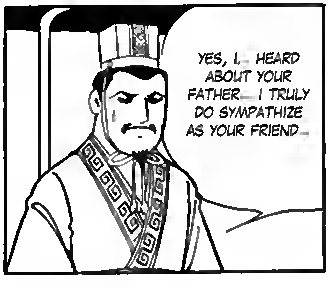
AH, GOOD DAY, WU ZIXU..


WHERE ARE YOU GOING DRESSED LIKE THAT?


AFTER GENERATIONS OF LOYAL SERVICE THE HOUSE OF WU HAS GIVEN TO CHU, OUR CURRENT KING HAS DECIDED TO EXECUTE MY FATHER ON FALSE CHARGES MY BROTHER HAS GONE TO THE CAPITAL TO SAVE HIM, BUT IT WILL BE IN VAIN. I ALONE REFUSED TO DIE A MEANINGLESS DEATH AND AM NOW FLEEING CHU SO THAT I MAY ENACT VENGEANCE UPON KING PING ONE DAY.

32


I ADMIT THAT OUR KING HAS ACTED MORE AS A TYRANT THAN A RIGHTEOUS RULER, BUT I AM STILL A MAN OF CHU BY BIRTH AND HEART. SHOULD YOU BRING WAR UPON MY HOMELANDS AND PEOPLE, I WILL DEFEND CHU TO THE LAST OF MY BREATH.


YES, I... HEARD ABOUT YOUR FATHER... I TRULY DO SYMPATHIZE AS YOUR FRIEND...

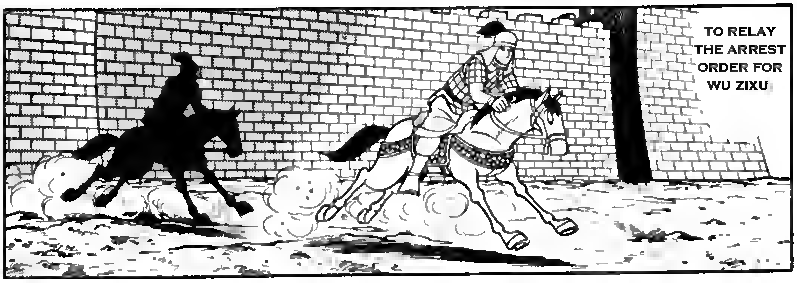
AND SO CHU HAS LOST ANOTHER MAN OF GREAT TALENT...

SUCH IS FATE, THEN. LET US CROSS SWORDS IN BATTLE SOME DAY IN THE FUTURE. UNTIL THEN, FAREWELL, FRIEND.

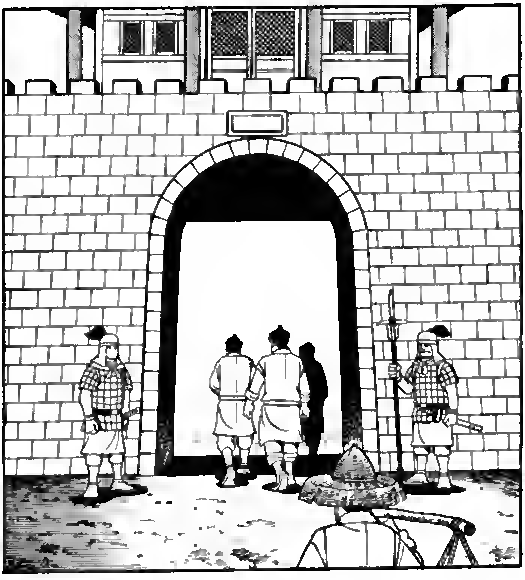
33

WU ZIXU SET OUT FOR THE NEIGHBOURING STATE OF WU, AS IT WAS IN EAGER NEED OF TALENTED MEN TO SUPPORT ITS AMBITIOUS EXPANSIONIST POLICIES

MEANWHILE, MESSENGERS RODE BACK AND FORTH ACROSS CHU TERRITORY,


TO RELAY THE ARREST ORDER FOR WU ZIXU

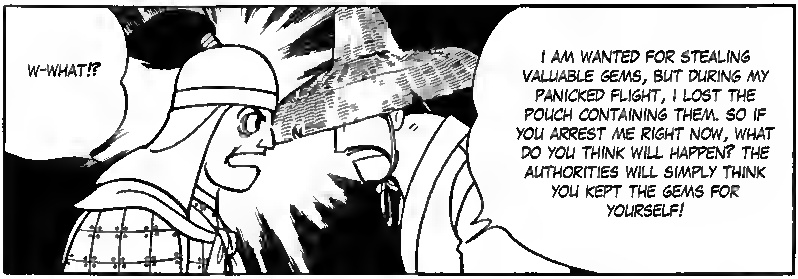
34



SHOW YOUR FACE!

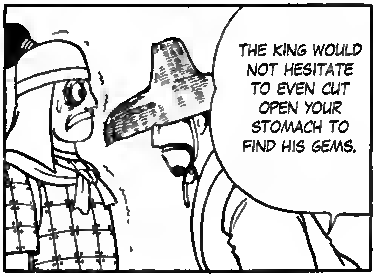
YOU THERE! HALT!

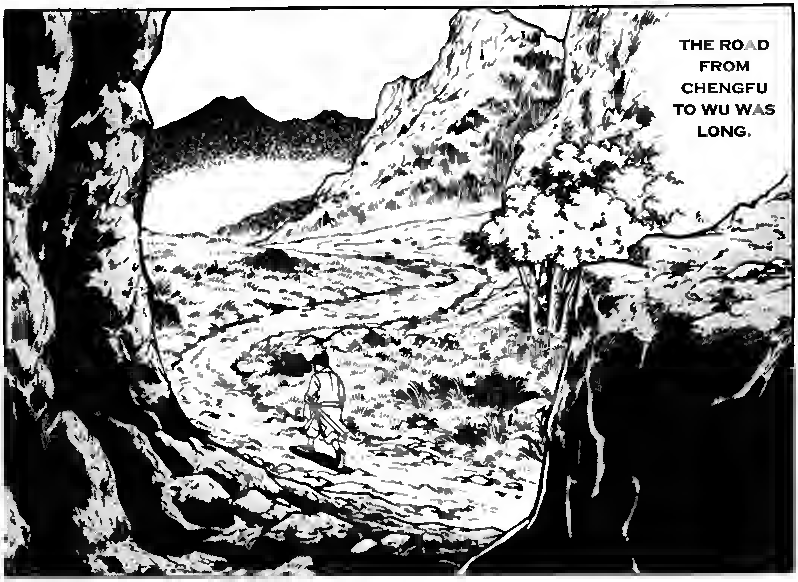
SSHH!
AH! YOU'RE THE WANTED M-


W-WHAT!?
I AM WANTED FOR STEALING VALUABLE GEMS, BUT DURING MY PANICKED FLIGHT, I LOST THE POUCH CONTAINING THEM. SO IF YOU ARREST ME RIGHT NOW, WHAT DO YOU THINK WILL HAPPEN? THE AUTHORITIES WILL SIMPLY THINK YOU KEPT THE GEMS FOR YOURSELF!

35

I... I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING AND I DIDN'T SEE ANYTHING! JUST GET OUT OF MY SIGHT AT ONCE!


THE KING WOULD NOT HESITATE TO EVEN CUT OPEN YOUR STOMACH TO FIND HIS GEMS.


THE ROAD FROM CHENGFU TO WU WAS LONG.

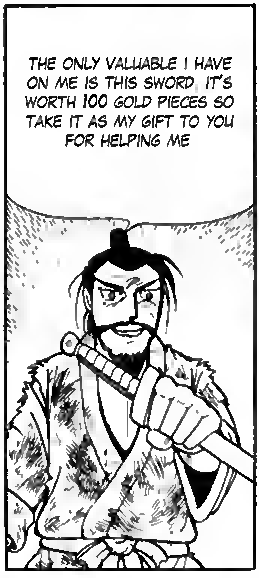
36

THE TREK WAS MADE EVEN MORE DIFFICULT BY ZIXU TAKING LESS TRAVELED ROADS TO ESCAPE DETECTION.

AT LAST, I'VE REACHED THE YANGTZE RIVER! ALL I HAVE TO DO IS CROSS THIS RIVER AND I'LL FINALLY BE IN WU LANDS...

37

MIGHT YOU GIVE ME A RIDE TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RIVER?
HELLO THERE, MISTER
SURE, GET ON.
38
SURE LOOKS LIKE IT WAS A DIFFICULT TREK FOR YOU
YES
TRAVEL-LING TO WU...?


THE ONLY VALUABLE I HAVE ON ME IS THIS SWORD. IT'S WORTH 100 GOLD PIECES SO TAKE IT AS MY GIFT TO YOU FOR HELPING ME

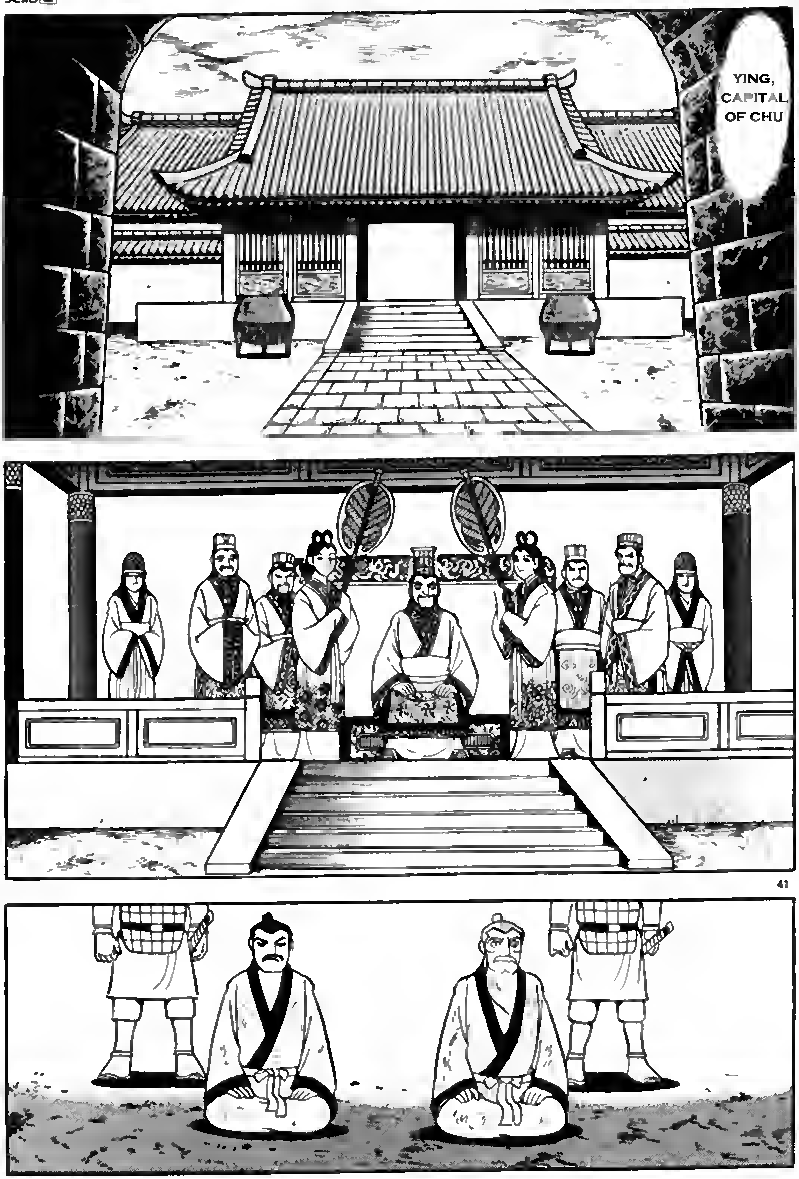
THANK YOU.
WELL, HERE WE ARE.

39

WHAT? THAT PUTS ME IN A BIT OF A BIND...

NO, I'M FINE.

THE MAN WHO CAPTURES THE WANTED CRIMINAL WU ZIXU WILL BE REWARDED WITH 50,000 BUSHELS OF GRAIN AND A TITLE OF NOBILITY. THIS WU ZIXU MUST SURELY BE QUITE SOMETHING TO WARRANT SUCH A HIGH BOUNTY.
PERHAPS YOU'RE NOT AWARE OF THE LATEST NEWS CIRCULATING ALL OVER CHU...
40
TAKE CARE THEN, TRAVELLER.
IF I WERE REALLY IN WANT OF MONEY, WHY SHOULD I BE SATISFIED WITH A MERE 100 GOLD PIECES?


YING, CAPITAL OF CHU
41

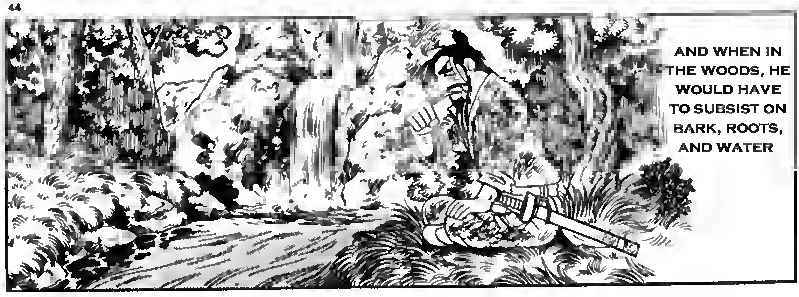
HAHA...
FOR THE CRIME OF TREASON, WU SHE AND HIS SON, WU SHANG, WILL HEREBY BE SENTENCED TO DEATH!
AHAHAHA!
THE TWO OF US HAVE LONG PREPARED FOR THIS FATE SO IT IS OF LITTLE CONCERN TO US.
JUST WHAT IS SO FUNNY!?
42
BUT FROM WHAT I HEAR, YOU HAVE STILL FAILED TO CAPTURE MY SON, ZIXU. AS LONG AS ZIXU IS ALIVE, HE WILL NOT FORGIVE YOUR CRIMES. YOU MAY THINK THAT YOU'LL ATTAIN SECURITY AND PEACE OF MIND BY PUTTING US TO DEATH, BUT YOU'LL SOON BE FORCED TO RECKON WITH ZIXU'S INCOMPARABLE WRATH. HOW CAN I NOT LAUGH AT FOOLS WILLINGLY DIGGING THEIR OWN GRAVES?

OFF WITH THEIR HEADS! NOW!
AHAHA!
AHAHAHA!
COME!
43
WU SHE AND WU SHANG WERE THUS PROMPTLY EXECUTED.

ALTHOUGH WU ZIXU WAS NOW IN WU LANOS, HE STILL HAO A LONG WAYS TO GO TO REACH WU'S CAPITAL.

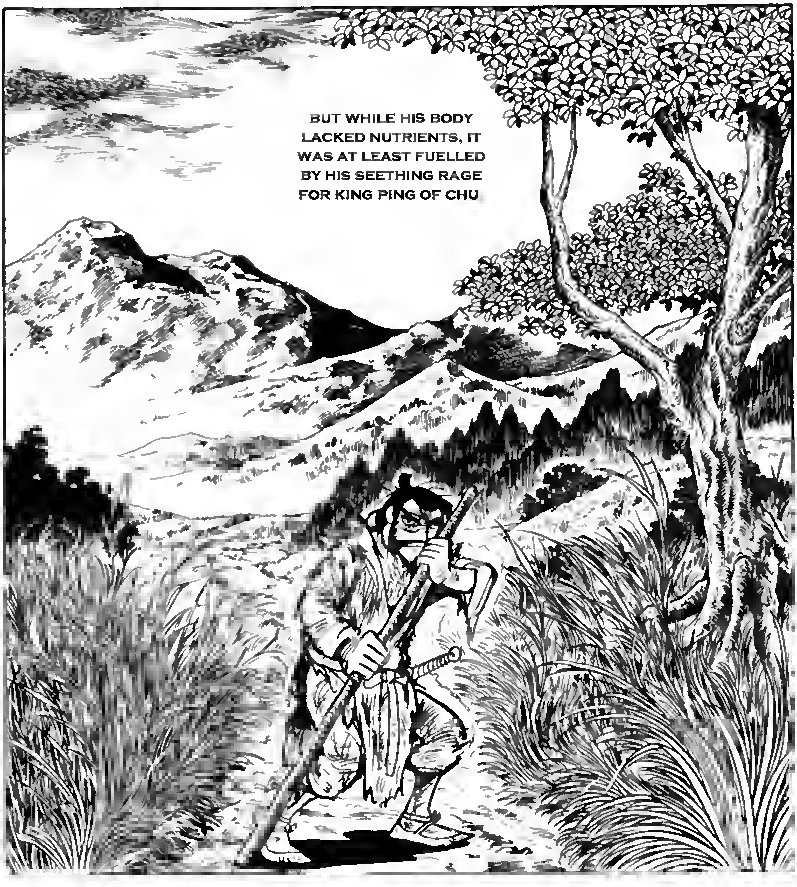
WITHOUT ANY MONEY, HE HAO TO SWALLOW HIS PRIOE ANO GROVEL FOR FOOO AT VILLAGES.

44


AND WHEN IN THE WOODS, HE WOULD HAVE TO SUBSIST ON BARK, ROOTS, AND WATER

COLLAPSING FROM SHEER HUNGER AND TEETERING ON THE VERGE OF DEATH WAS NOT AN INFREQUENT OCCURRENCE

45


BUT WHILE HIS BODY LACKED NUTRIENTS, IT WAS AT LEAST FUELLED BY HIS SEETHING RAGE FOR KING PING OF CHU

WU CAPITAL
AN HONOUR TO MEET YOU, SIR. I AM WU ZIXU FROM CHU
I AM PRINCE GUANG OF WU.
46
I HAVE VENTURED ALL THE WAY HERE, HEARING THAT WU WAS IN NEED OF TALENTED MEN.
IT SEEMS YOU WENT THROUGH HELL ITSELF JUST TO GET HERE

I MUST GIVE MY CONDOLENCES FOR WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR FATHER AND BROTHER

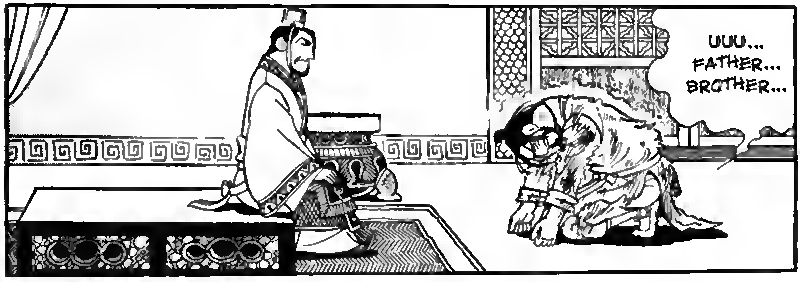
THANK YOU, SIR
I OF COURSE KNOW THE REPUTATION OF YOUR FAMILY. I WILL GLADLY ACCEPT YOU AS MY RETAINER.

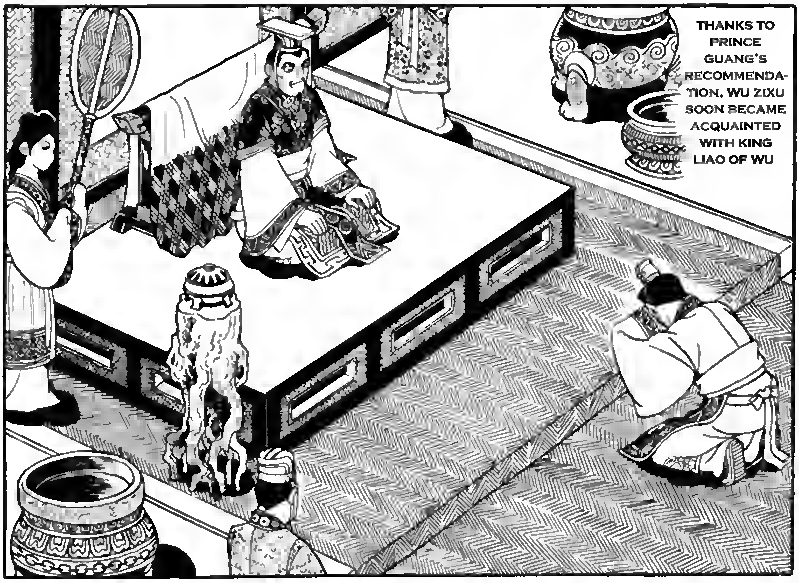
HAVE YOU HEARD ANY RECENT NEWS ON THEM?

IS THAT SO.. I EXPECTED AS MUCH BUT...

YES, THEY WERE RECENTLY PUT TO DEATH...

47


UUU... FATHER... BROTHER...


THANKS TO PRINCE GUANG'S RECOMMENDATION, WU ZIXU SOON BECAME ACQUAINTED WITH KING LIAO OF WU

YES, WITH THE ONGOING WEAKENING OF ZHOU AUTHORITY, WU MUST EXPAND TO SECURE HER OWN SOVEREIGNTY.

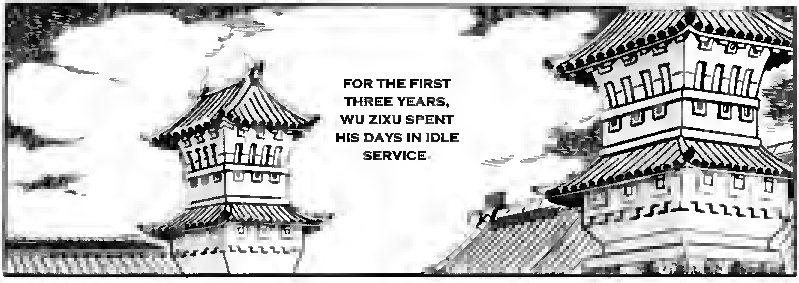
I HEAR YOU'RE EAGER IN ADOPTING EXPANSIONIST POLICIES, YOUR HIGHNESS

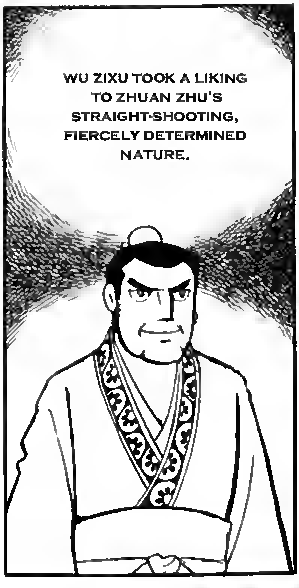
48

YES, I UNDERSTAND THAT WELL.
THEN I RECOMMEND CONQUERING CHU AND YUE BEFORE AIMING FOR THE HEARTLANDS OF THE ZHOU REALM. WERE YOU TO PRIORITIZE THE HEARTLANDS, YOU'LL QUICKLY FACE A HOSTILE COALITION.

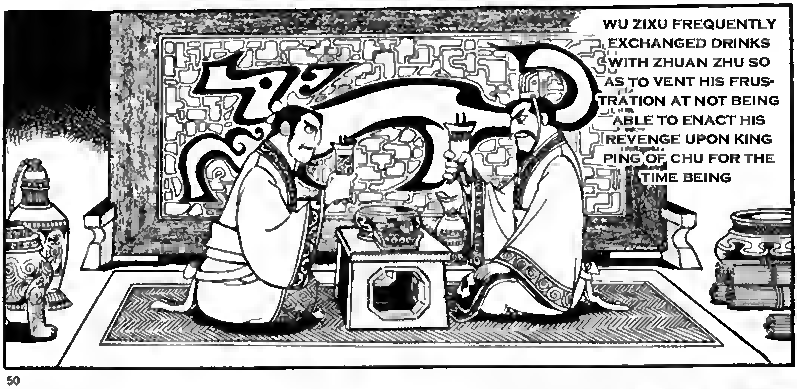
I'LL KEEP THAT IN MIND BUT AS IT STANDS, WU IS IN NO SHAPE TO CONTEND ON EQUAL GROUNDS AGAINST THE MIGHTY CHU
IF YOU INTEND ON RAISING TROOPS AGAINST CHU, I WILL GLADLY OFFER YOU MANY VALUABLE INSIGHTS ON CHU'S LAND, CITIES, AND ARMIES WHICH CAN YOU THEN EXPLOIT.
YES, YOUR HIGHNESS
BUT ONCE WU HAS BUILT UP ITS STRENGTH, I WILL SURELY MAKE THE BEST USE OF YOUR KNOWLEDGE.

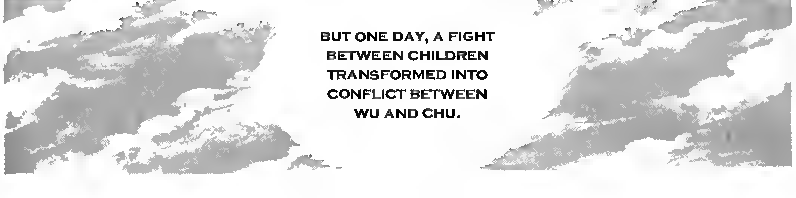
49

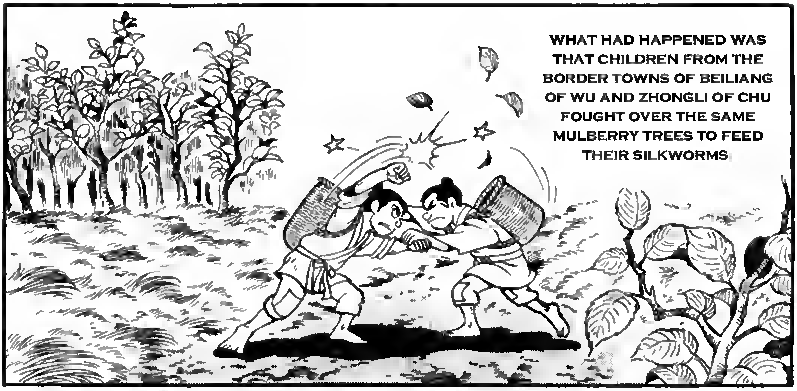

FOR THE FIRST THREE YEARS, WU ZIXU SPENT HIS DAYS IN IDLE SERVICE.


WU ZIXU TOOK A LIKING TO ZHUAN ZHU'S STRAIGHT-SHOOTING, FIERCELY DETERMINED NATURE.

DURING THIS TIME, HE BECAME ACQUAINTED WITH ZHUAN ZHU.

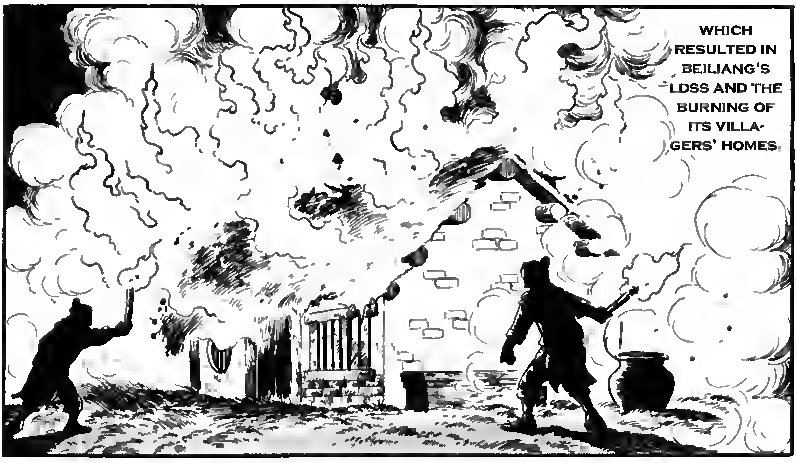

WU ZIXU FREQUENTLY EXCHANGED DRINKS WITH ZHUAN ZHU SO AS TO VENT HIS FRUSTRATION AT NOT BEING ABLE TO ENACT HIS REVENGE UPON KING PING OF CHU FOR THE TIME BEING


BUT ONE DAY, A FIGHT BETWEEN CHILDREN TRANSFORMED INTO CONFLICT BETWEEN WU AND CHU.


WHAT HAD HAPPENED WAS THAT CHILDREN FROM THE BORDER TOWNS OF BEILIANG OF WU AND ZHONGLI OF CHU FOUGHT OVER THE SAME MULBERRY TREES TO FEED THEIR SILKWORMS.

THE FIGHT QUICKLY SPREAD TO THE ADULTS,

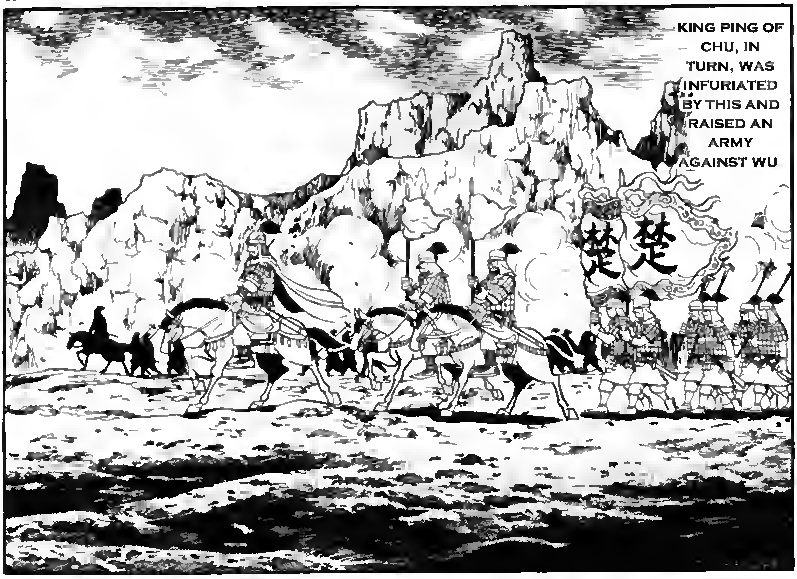
51


WHICH RESULTED IN BEILIANG'S LOSS AND THE BURNING OF ITS VILLAGERS' HOMES.

AND RAISED TROOPS TO RAID ZHONGLI AS REVENGE.

THE WU AUTHORITY WHOSE JURISDICTION INCLUDED BEILIANG WAS INCENSED BY THIS,

52


KING PING OF CHU, IN TURN, WAS INFURIATED BY THIS AND RAISED AN ARMY AGAINST WU
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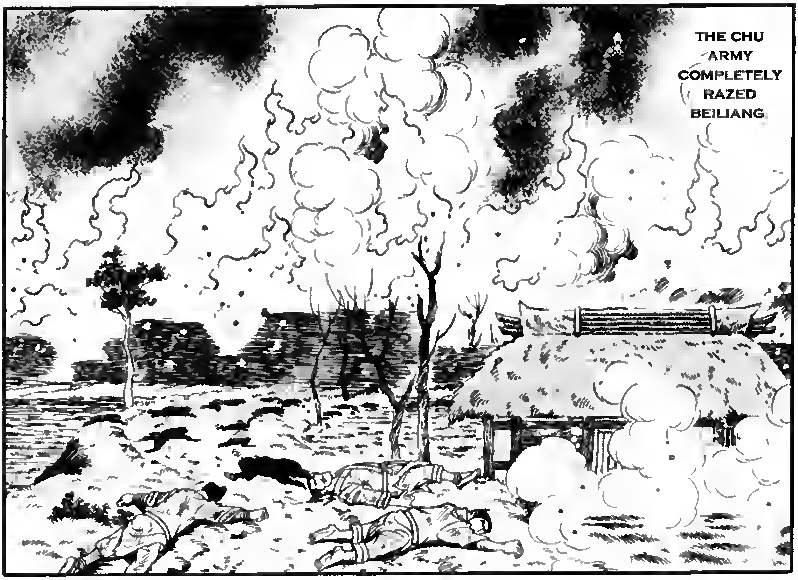
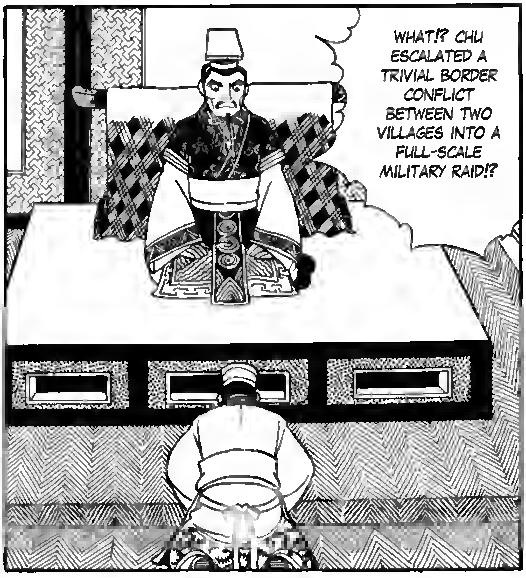
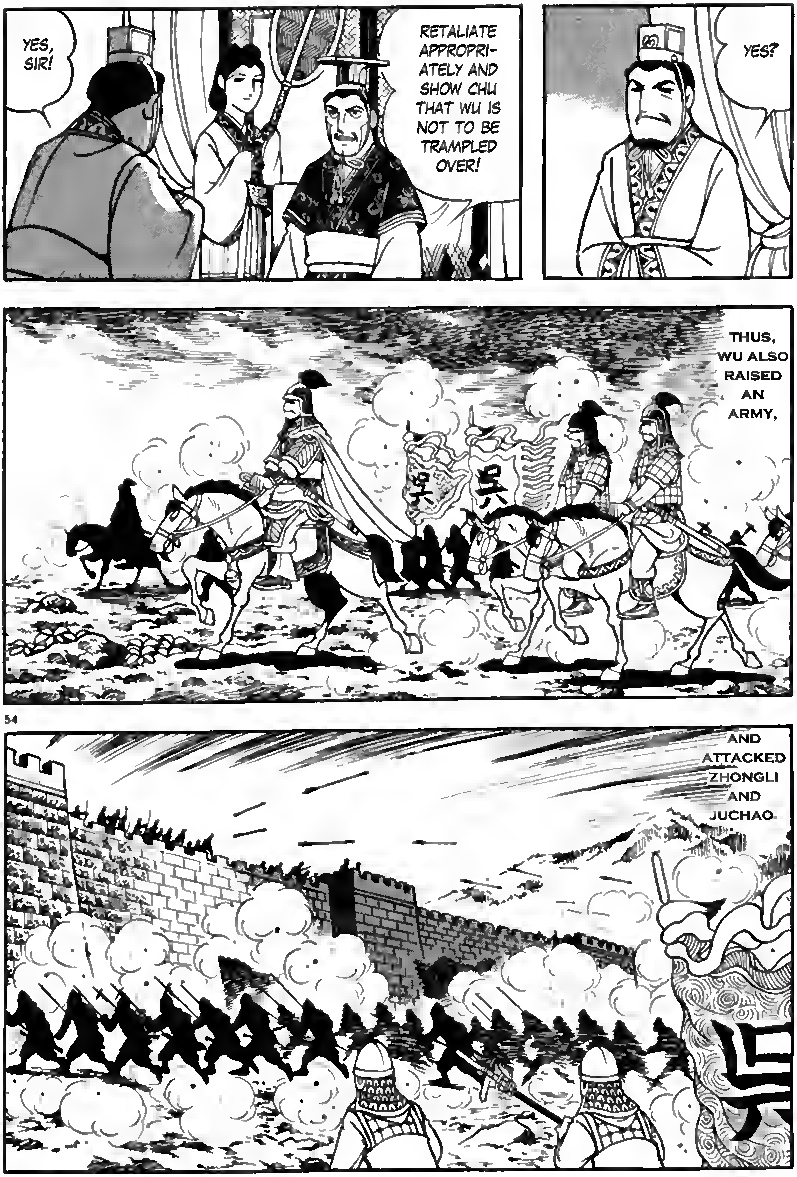

THE CHU ARMY COMPLETELY RAZED BEILIANG.

53

THERE'S A LIMIT TO HOW MUCH HE CAN UNDERSTIMATE WU'S POWER!


WHAT!? CHU ESCALATED A TRIVIAL BORDER CONFLICT BETWEEN TWO VILLAGES INTO A FULL-SCALE MILITARY RAID!?

PRINCE GUANG!


YES, SIR!
RETALIATE APPROPRIATELY AND SHOW CHU THAT WU IS NOT TO BE TRAMPLED OVER!
YES?
THUS, WU ALSO RAISED AN ARMY,
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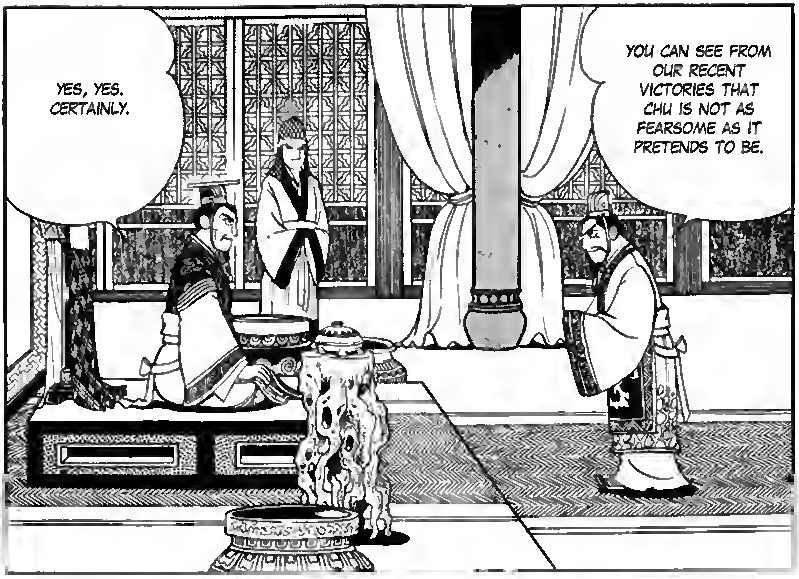
54
AND ATTACKED ZHONGLI AND JUCHAO...

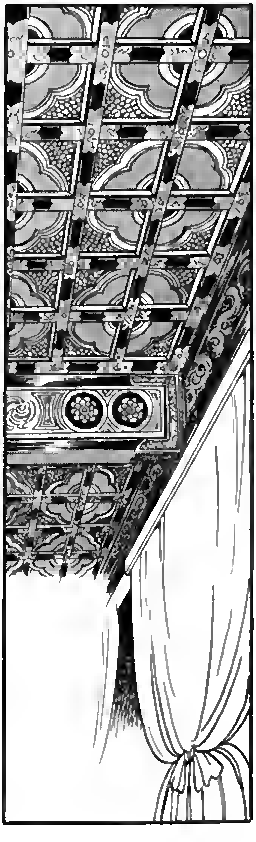
BOTH PLACES WERE CAPUTRED.
55


YES, YES. CERTAINLY.
YOU CAN SEE FROM OUR RECENT VICTORIES THAT CHU IS NOT AS FEARSOME AS IT PRETENDS TO BE.

HMM... I'LL THINK ABOUT IT.

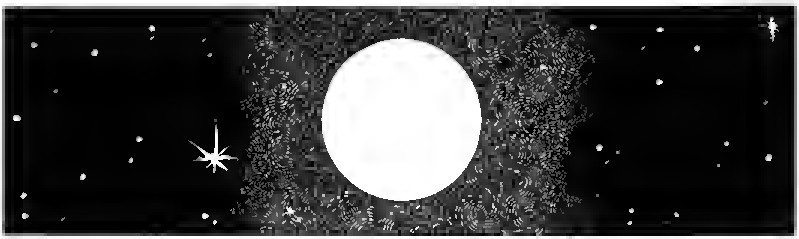
I SAY WE RIDE THIS WAVE OF SUCCESS AND MOUNT AN ATTACK ON THE CAPITAL OF CHU. YOUR HIGHNESS WILL THEN BE THE UNCONTESTED SUPREME RULER OF THE SOUTH!

WHAT DO YOU THINK? IS IT NOT TIME FOR ME TO SERIOUSLY ASSERT MYSELF AMONG THE PEERS OF THE ZHOU REALM?
WU ZIXU SUGGESTS AN ATTACK ON CHU'S CAPITAL?



WU ZIXU ONLY WISHES TO AVENGE THE DEATHS OF HIS FATHER AND BROTHER. HE IS OVEREAGER IN ASSESSING OUR MILITARY POWER. I, ON THE OTHER HAND, DO NOT BELEIVE WE CAN REALLY WAGE A FULL-SCALE WAR ON CHU AT THE MOMENT.

YES, BUT WE ARE SURELY INCHING TOWARDS CHU'S LEVEL. JUST GIVE IT A LITTLE MORE TIME.
OH, SO YOU THINK IT'S STILL PREMATURE?



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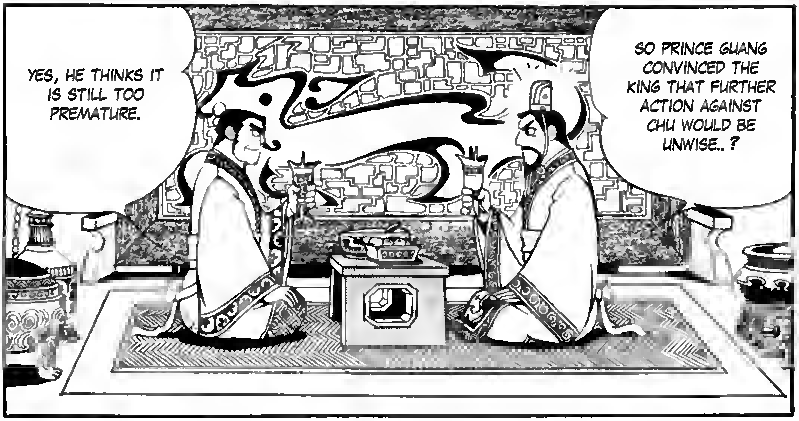
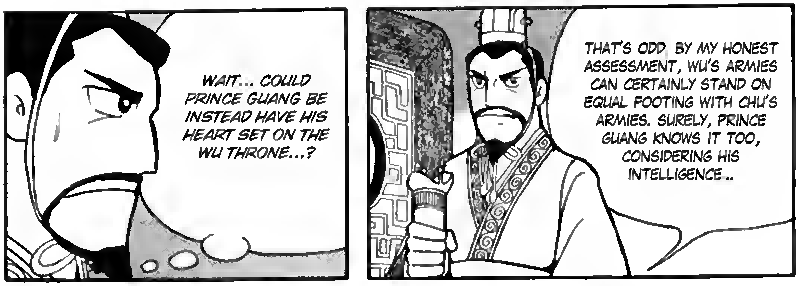

YES, HE THINKS IT IS STILL TOO PREMATURE.
SO PRINCE GUANG CONVINCED THE KING THAT FURTHER ACTION AGAINST CHU WOULD BE UNWISE..?


WAIT... COULD PRINCE GUANG BE INSTEAD HAVE HIS HEART SET ON THE WU THRONE...?
THAT'S ODD. BY MY HONEST ASSESSMENT, WU'S ARMIES CAN CERTAINLY STAND ON EQUAL FOOTING WITH CHU'S ARMIES. SURELY, PRINCE GUANG KNOWS IT TOO, CONSIDERING HIS INTELLIGENCE..
YES, THAT'S MORE THAN POSSIBLE CONSIDERING THE CURRENT ORDER OF SUCCESSION..

58

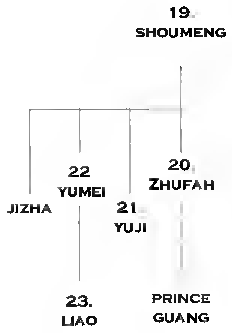
KING SHOUMENG OF WU HAD FOUR SONS: ZHUFAN, YUJI, YUMEI, AND JIZHA.

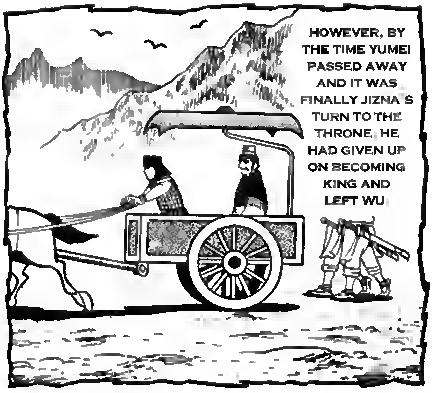
KING SHOUMENG THUS WISHED TO MAKE JIZHA HIS SUCCESSOR, BELIEVING JIZHA COULD SUCCESSFULLY EXPAND WU INTO THE ZHOU HEARTLANDS.

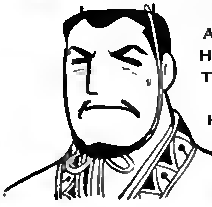
THE YOUNGEST JIZHA WAS CLEARLY THE MOST TALENTED AMONG THE FOUR.

BUT JIZHA DID NOT FEEL IT WAS PROPER FOR HIM TO VIOLATE TRADITIONAL RULES OF SENIORITY AND THUS REFUSED TO BECOME KING WHEN THEIR FATHER PASSED AWAY.

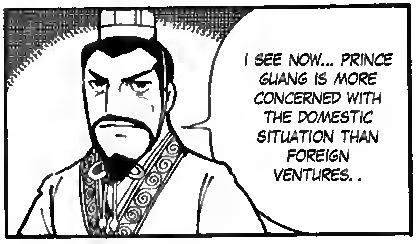
THUS, THE ELDEST SON ZHUFAN BECAME KING BUT LISTED HIS BROTHERS AS NEXT IN SUCCESSION ACCORDING TO AGE SO THAT JIZHA COULD EVENTUALLY BECOME KING. IN DOING SO, ZHUFAN'S SON, PRINCE GUANG, WAS PASSED OVER.




HOWEVER, BY THE TIME YUMEI PASSED AWAY AND IT WAS FINALLY JIZNA'S TURN TO THE THRONE, HE HAD GIVEN UP ON BECOMING KING AND LEFT WU.



PRINCE GUANG, ZHUFAN'S SON, WAS NOT AMUSED BY THIS DEVELOPMENT. HIS FATHER HAD INITIALLY DECIDED TO PASS THE THRONE TO HIS YOUNGER BRDTHERS WITH THE INTENTION OF EVENTUALLY ENTHRONING JIZHA. HDWEVER, NOW THAT JIZHA HAD REJECTED THE THRONE, PRINCE GUANG FELT THIS ARRANGEMENT SHOULD BE NULLIFIED, MEANING HE SHOULD BE KING.



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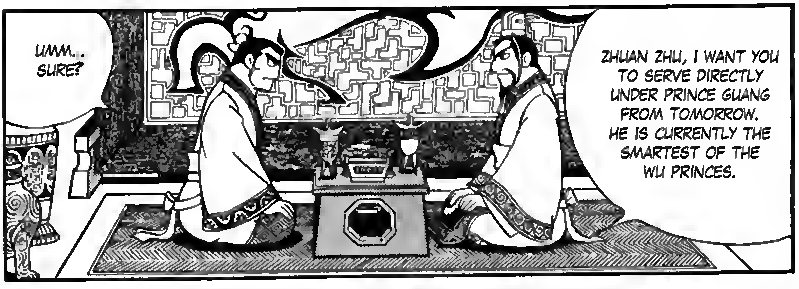
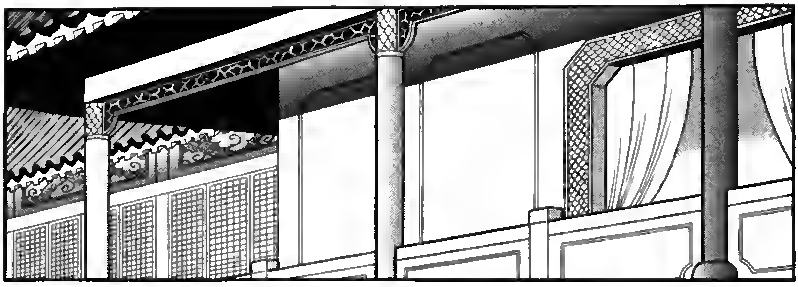
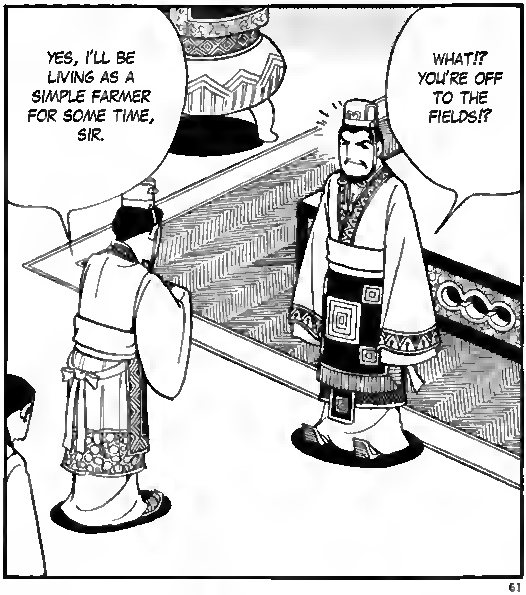

UMM.. SURE?
ZHUAN ZHU, I WANT YOU TO SERVE DIRECTLY UNDER PRINCE GUANG FROM TOMORROW. HE IS CURRENTLY THE SMARTEST OF THE WU PRINCES.



BUT I HAVE ONE REQUEST TO MAKE BEFORE I LEAVE.

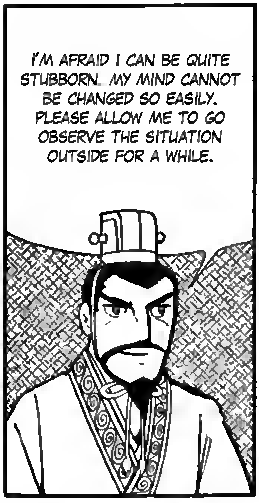
WHICH IS?


YES, I'LL BE LIVING AS A SIMPLE FARMER FOR SOME TIME, SIR.
WHAT!? YOU'RE OFF TO THE FIELDS!?

61

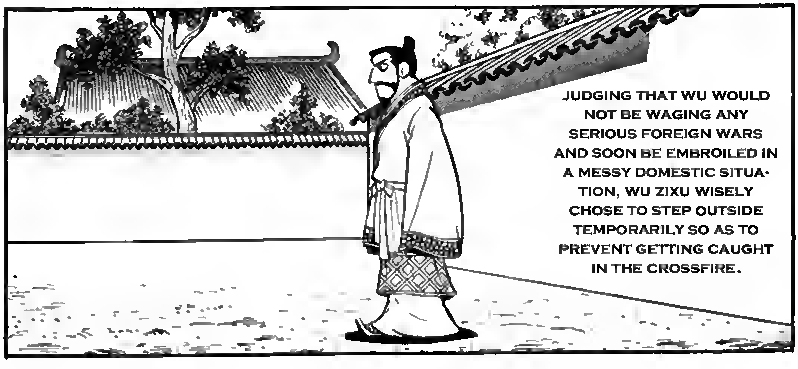
PLEASE ACCEPT ZHUAN ZHU HERE INTO YOUR SERVICE. HE IS A FIERCELY DETERMINED MAN WHO WILL SURELY CARRY OUT YOUR COMMANDS, NO MATTER HOW DIFFICULT. USE HIM WELL.

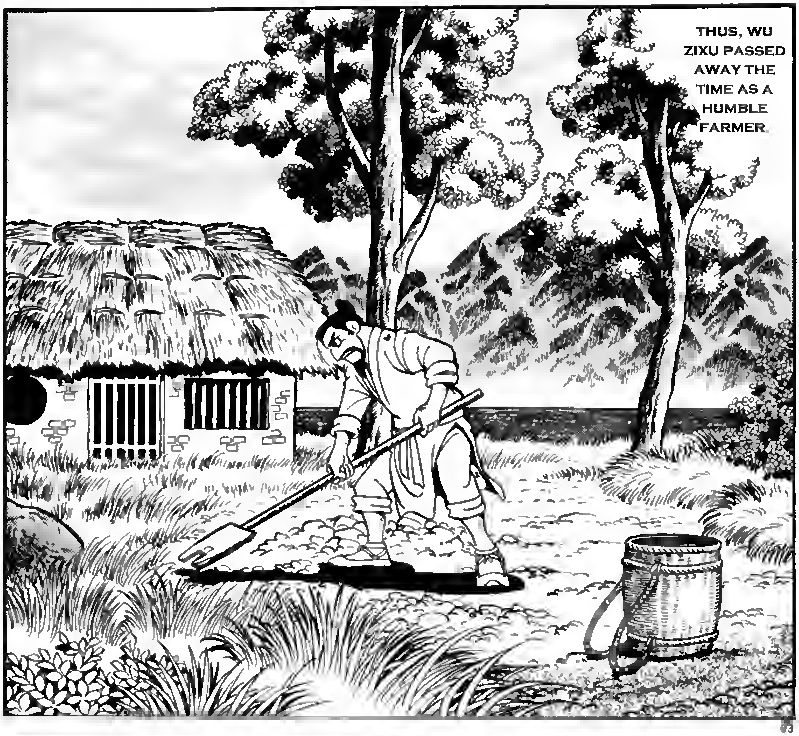
FORGIVE ME FOR THE SELFISH REQUESTS
WELL, IF YOU RECOMMEND HIM SO HIGHLY, I'LL ACCEPT.


I'M AFRAID I CAN BE QUITE STUBBORN. MY MIND CANNOT BE CHANGED SO EASILY. PLEASE ALLOW ME TO GO OBSERVE THE SITUATION OUTSIDE FOR A WHILE.

WHAT A SHAME I QUITE ENJOYED HAVING YOU AS A DISCUSSION PARTNER. WILL YOU REALLY INSIST ON LEAVING?
I PROMISE I WILL ONE DAY PAY MY DEBT TO YOU. SHOULD YOU REQUIRE MY HELP, PLEASE FEEL FREE TO CONTACT ME ANY TIME.

62


JUDGING THAT WU WOULD NOT BE WAGING ANY SERIOUS FOREIGN WARS AND SOON BE EMBROILED IN A MESSY DOMESTIC SITUATION, WU ZIXU WISELY CHOSE TO STEP OUTSIDE TEMPORARILY SO AS TO PREVENT GETTING CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE.


THUS, WU ZIXU PASSED AWAY THE TIME AS A HUMBLE FARMER.

FOUR LONG YEARS PASSED AWAY WITH WU ZIXU STILL ACCOMPLISHING NOTHING.

MASTER WU ZIXU!

?

DID PRINCE GUANG SEND YOU..?

64

WHAT NEWS?

YES, HE TOLD ME TO REPORT THIS NEWS TO YOU.

WHAT!?

KING PING OF CHU HAS PASSED AWAY.

H... HOW CAN THIS BE... I'VE ONLY ENDURD ALL MY PAIN AND HUMILIATION UNTIL NOW SO THAT I COULD KILL HIM ONE DAY..

N-N-NO, OF COURSE NOT! WHY WOULD I EVER JOKE ABOUT SUCH A THING!?
IS THAT TRUE!? YOU'RE NOT JOKING, ARE YOU!?

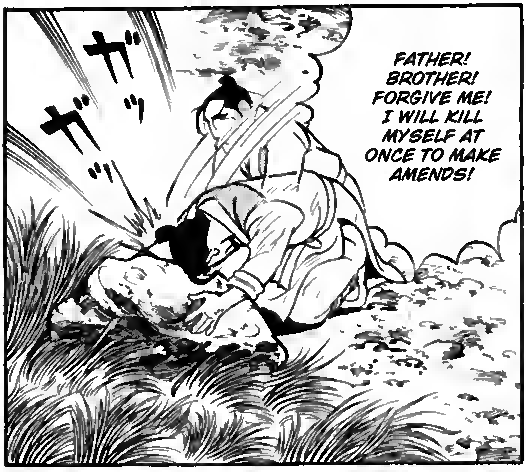
65

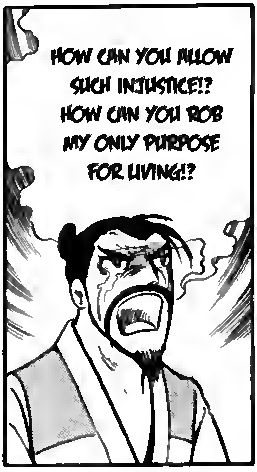
I... I AM NO COWARD! I DID NOT FLEE THAT DAY SIMPLY TO PRESERVE MY LIFE! I FLED FOR THE GREATER PURPOSE OF REVENGE!

BUT HE DIED BEFORE I COULD EVEN DO ANYTHING... DOES THIS MEAN THAT I'M NOTHING BUT A DISGRACED FAILURE WHO ABANDONED HIS FATHER AND BROTHER!?

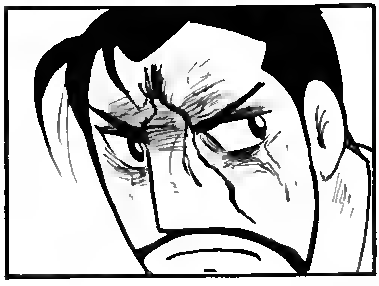
OH, HEAVEN! HOW CAN YOU GRANT A PEACEFUL DEATH TO THAT WRETCHED TYRANT!?

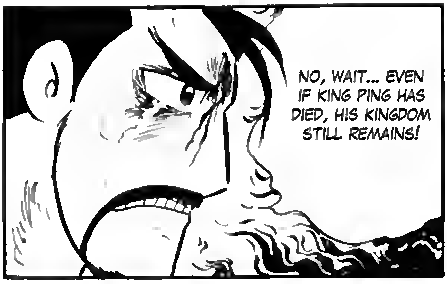
BUT JUST WHAT HAVE I BEEN DOING...!? WHAT HAS COME OUT OF THE LAST 7 YEARS...!?


FATHER! BROTHER! FORGIVE ME! I WILL KILL MYSELF AT ONCE TO MAKE AMENDS!


HOW CAN YOU ALLOW SUCH INJUSTICE!? HOW CAN YOU ROB MY ONLY PURPOSE FOR LIVING!?

66

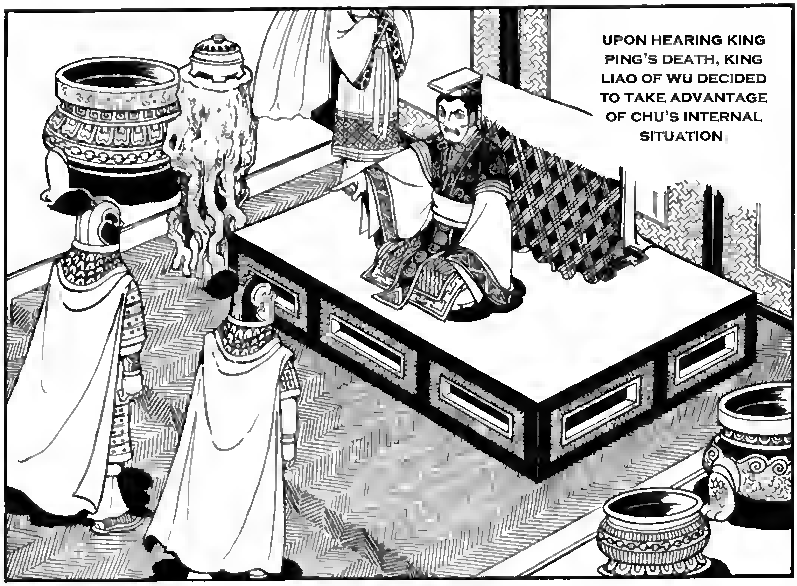



NO, WAIT... EVEN IF KING PING HAS DIED, HIS KINGDOM STILL REMAINS!

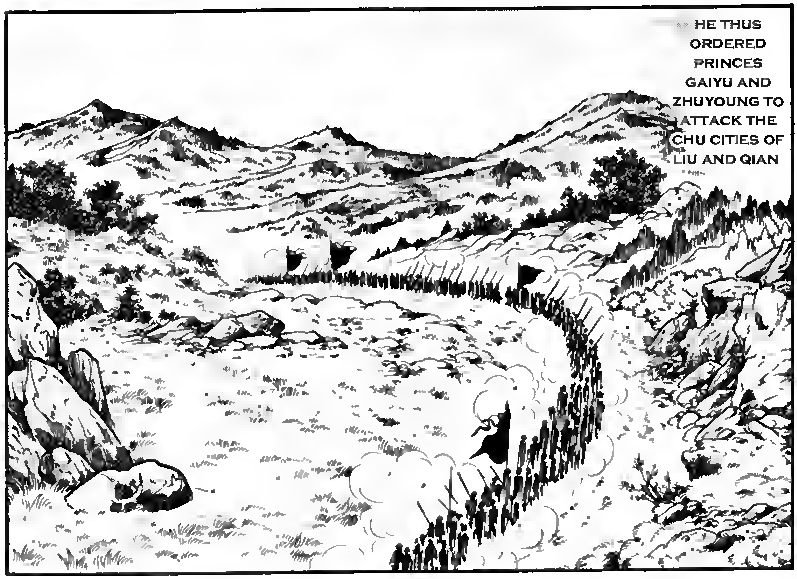
EEK! H-H-HE'S LOST HIS MIND...!

67

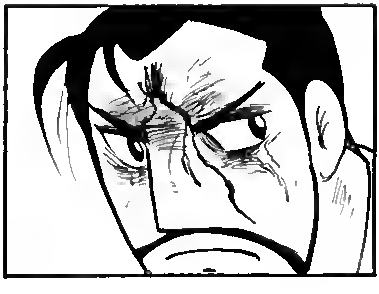
AS LONG AS MY BODY CONTINUES TO DRAW BREATH, I WILL SEE TO THE DESTRUCTION OF CHU! I WILL NOT ALLOW THE KINGS OF CHU TO EXIST!


UPON HEARING KING PING'S DEATH, KING LIAO OF WU DECIDED TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF CHU'S INTERNAL SITUATION

69

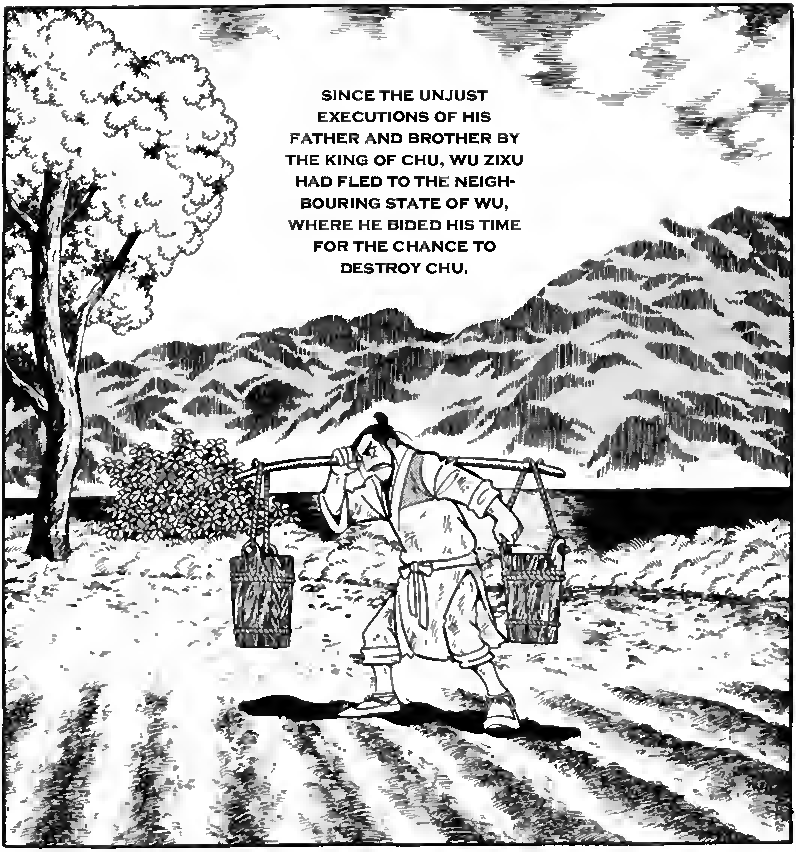

HE THUS ORDERED PRINCES GAIYU AND ZHUYOUNG TO ATTACK THE CHU CITIES OF LIU AND QIAN

HOWEVER, WU ZIXU PATIENTLY BIDED HIS TIME EVEN THOUGH THE LONG-WAITED WAR BETWEEN CHU AND WU WAS NOW UNDERWAY.
HE KNEW BETTER THAN ANYONE THAT WITH THE WU ARMIES IN CHU, THE TIME TO ASSASSINATE KING LIAO WAS RIPE. AND HE ALSO KNEW PRINCE GUANG REALIZED THIS TOO.



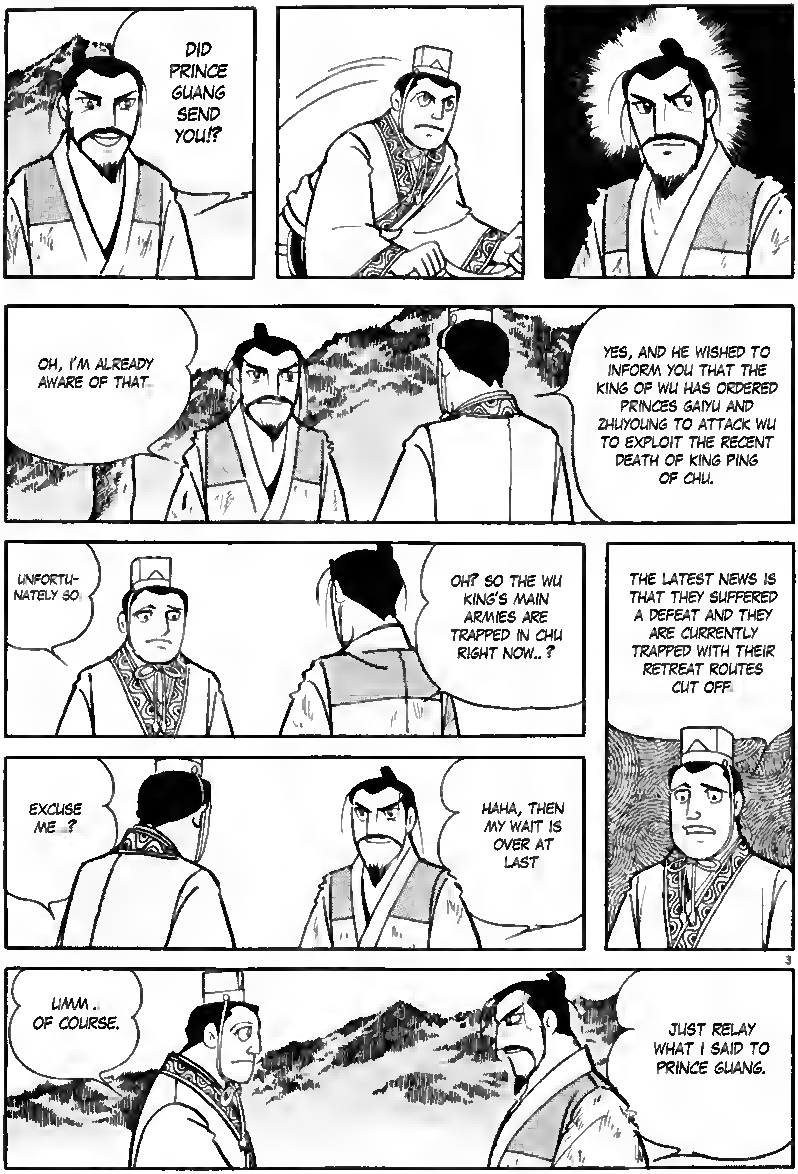
Chapter 2

Demon of Vengeance, Part 2


SINCE THE UNJUST EXECUTIONS OF HIS FATHER AND BROTHER BY THE KING OF CHU, WU ZIXU HAD FLED TO THE NEIGH-BOURING STATE OF WU, WHERE HE BIDED HIS TIME FOR THE CHANCE TO DESTROY CHU.

2

MASTER WU ZIXU!


DID PRINCE GUANG SEND YOU!?
OH, I'M ALREADY AWARE OF THAT.
YES, AND HE WISHED TO INFORM YOU THAT THE KING OF WU HAS ORDERED PRINCES GAIYU AND ZHUYONG TO ATTACK WU TO EXPLOIT THE RECENT DEATH OF KING PING OF CHU.
UNFORTUNATELY SO.
OH? SO THE WU KING'S MAIN ARMIES ARE TRAPPED IN CHU RIGHT NOW..?
THE LATEST NEWS IS THAT THEY SUFFERED A DEFEAT AND THEY ARE CURRENTLY TRAPPED WITH THEIR RETREAT ROUTES CUT OFF.
EXCUSE ME..?
HAHA, THEN MY WAIT IS OVER AT LAST
3
UMM. OF COURSE.
JUST RELAY WHAT I SAID TO PRINCE GUANG.

YES, DO YOU KNOW WHAT HE MEANT?
WU ZIXU SAID HE'S DONE WAITING?
SO EVEN WU ZIXU THINKS NOW IS THE BEST TIME TO SEIZE THE THRONE...
WITH THE KING'S ARMIES TRAPPED IN CHU, I HAVE SUFFICIENT TROOPS TO NOT ONLY KILL KING LIAO BUT QUELL ANY IMMEDIATELY RESULTING BACKLASH. THIS IS A ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME OPPORTUNITY.
YES, SIR.
SUMMON ZHUAN ZHU

YES, COME CLOSER!

DID YOU CALL FOR ME, SIR?

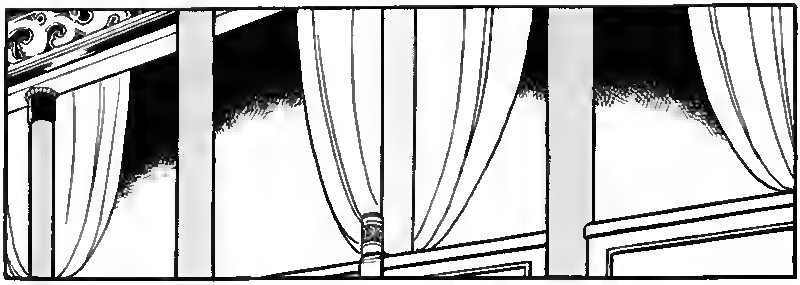
IT JUST SO HAPPENS THE KING'S TROOPS ARE FEW IN THE CAPITAL RIGHT NOW EVEN WU ZIXU THINKS THE TIME IS RIPE...

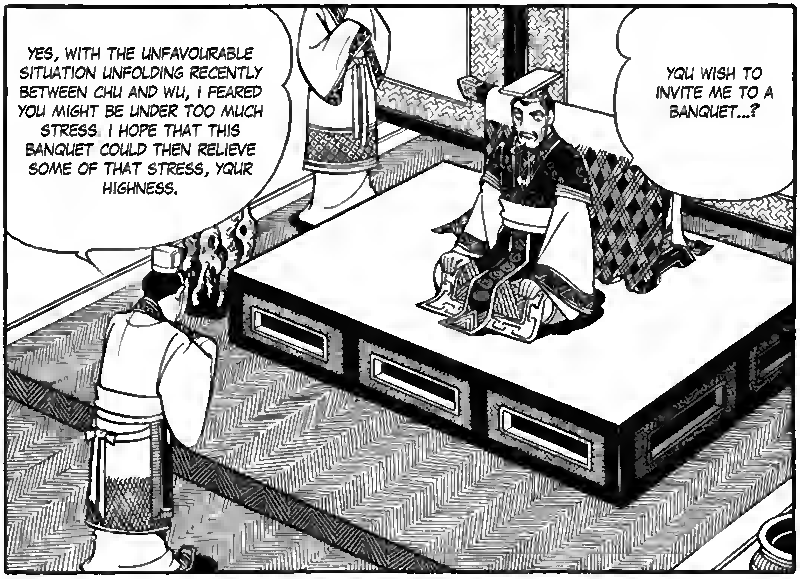
NATURALLY.
LET ME BE FRANK WITH YOU. I'M QUITE RESENTFUL THAT MY YOUNGER COUSIN IS THE CURRENT KING. ORIGINALLY, BY PRIMOGENITURE, MY FATHER WOULD HAVE PASSED THE THRONE TO ME INSTEAD OF MY UNCLE.

5

WHISPER WHISPER

AND SO, I ASK YOU. .



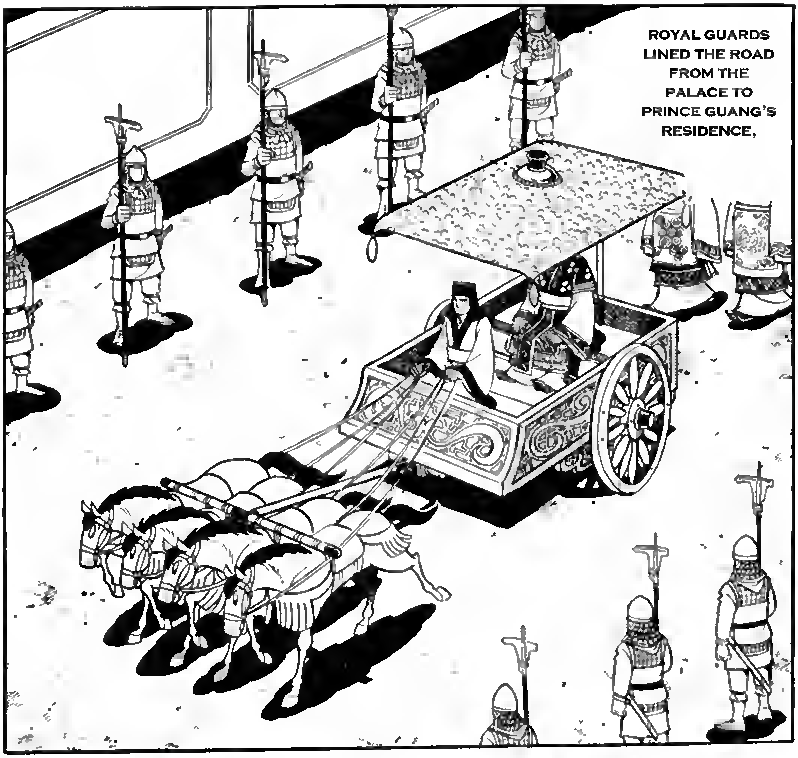

YOU WISH TO INVITE ME TO A BANQUET...?
YES, WITH THE UNFAVOURABLE SITUATION UNFOLDING RECENTLY BETWEEN CHU AND WU, I FEARED YOU MIGHT BE UNDER TOO MUCH STRESS. I HOPE THAT THIS BANQUET COULD THEN RELIEVE SOME OF THAT STRESS, YOUR HIGHNESS.

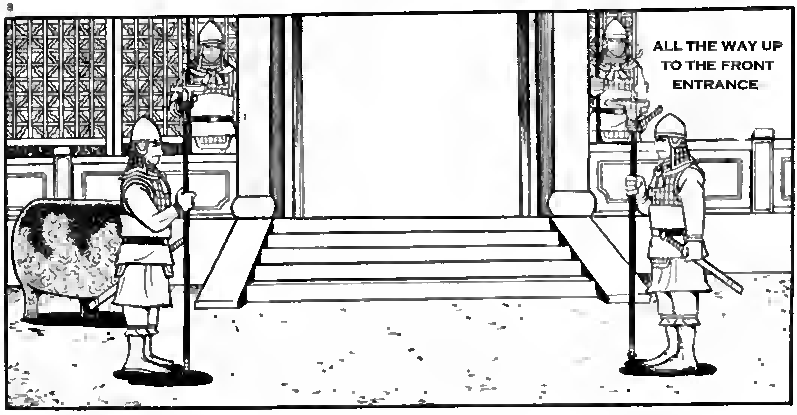
5

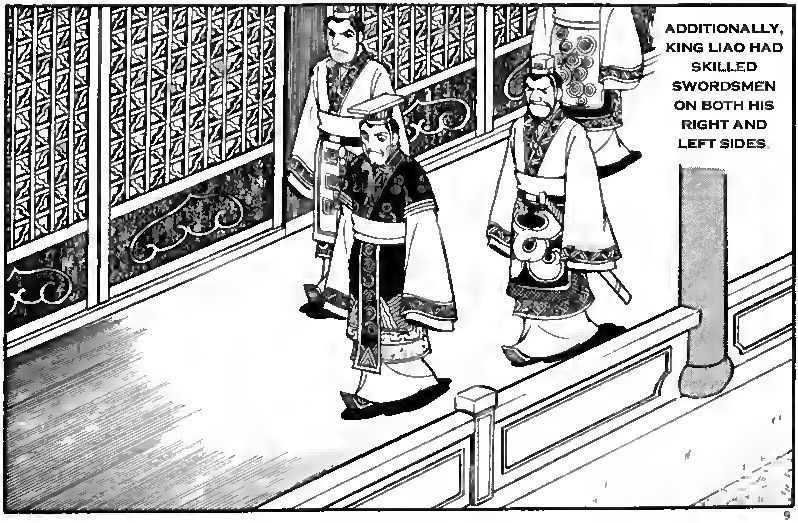
I AM HONOURED.

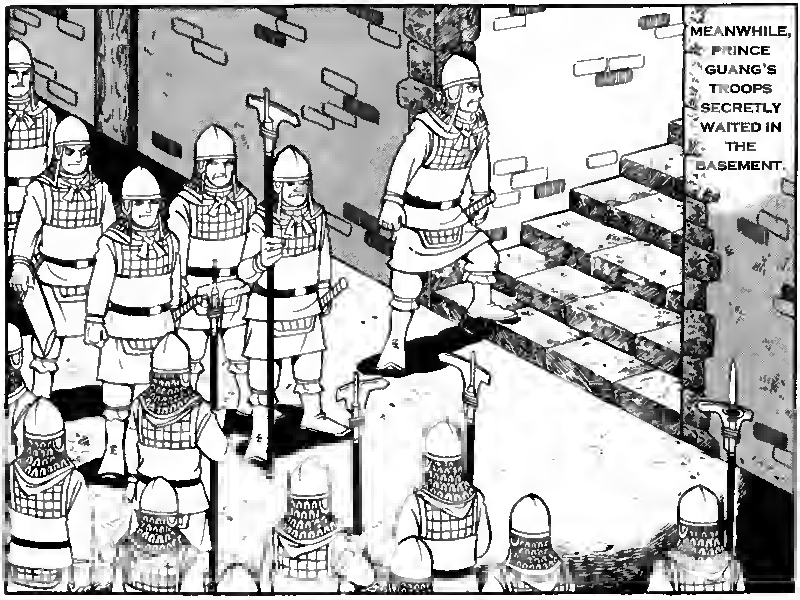
AH, I APPRECIATE THE GESTURE. I WILL GLADLY ATTEND.

ARE YOU AWARE OF THE RUMOURS THAT PRINCE GUANG RESENTS THAT YOU, DESPITE BEING HIS YOUNGER COUSIN, BECAME THE KING OF WU?
YES...
DO YOU REALLY PLAN ON ATTENDING, YOUR HIGHNESS?
BECAUSE THAT WOULD CAUSE A HOSTILE SPLIT BETWEEN US. FACTIONAL DIVISIONS AMONG THE WU OFFICERS AND MINISTERS WOULD SOON FOLLOW
WHY NOT?
YES, OF COURSE, BUT I THINK IT WOULD BE UNWISE TO REJECT THE INVITATION.
7
VERY WELL. PLEASE BE CAREFUL TO STATION GOOD BODYGUARDS BESIDE YOU AT ALL TIMES, YOUR HIGHNESS.
THAT IS WHY I'LL BRING ENOUGH GUARDS WITH ME TO THE BANQUET TO PREVENT THAT SCENARIO.
BUT WHAT IF PRINCE GUANG WERE TO EXECUTE THE COUP ALONE AT THE BANQUET...?
WITH MY FORCES TRAPPED IN CHU RIGHT NOW, THE LAST THING I WANT TO DO IS GIVE POWERFUL NOBLES A REASON TO BACK A COUP D'ETAT. THEY MUST BELIEVE THAT RELATIONS BETWEEN PRINCE GUANG AND I ARE PERFECTLY FINE.


ROYAL GUARDS LINED THE ROAD FROM THE PALACE TO PRINCE GUANG'S RESIDENCE,


ALL THE WAY UP TO THE FRONT ENTRANCE


ADDITIONALLY, KING LIAO HAD SKILLED SWORDSMEN ON BOTH HIS RIGHT AND LEFT SIDES.
9


MEANWHILE, PRINCE GUANG'S TROOPS SECRETLY WAITED IN THE BASEMENT.

THUS DID THE GRAND BANQUET BEGIN.
KING LIAO'S BODYGUARDS STOOD MENACINGLY RIGHT BEHIND HIM AT ALL TIMES.

YES, PRINCE GUANG...?

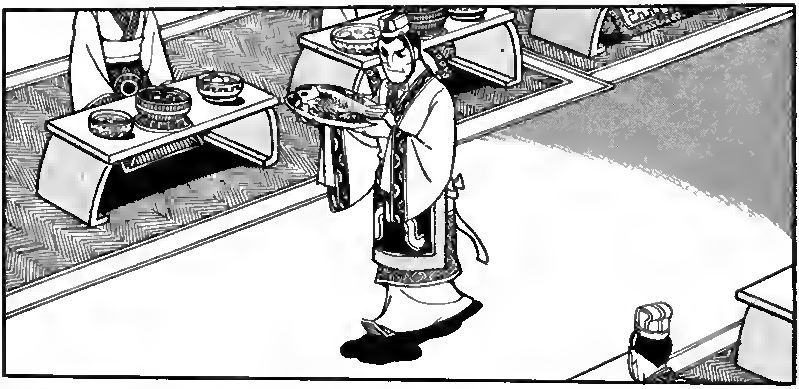
YOUR HIGHNESS

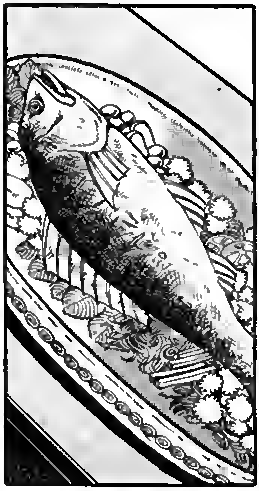
YES, OF COURSE YOU MAY.
IT SEEMS MY FEET HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP. MAY I EXCUSE MYSELF TO TAKE A BRIEF STROLL?

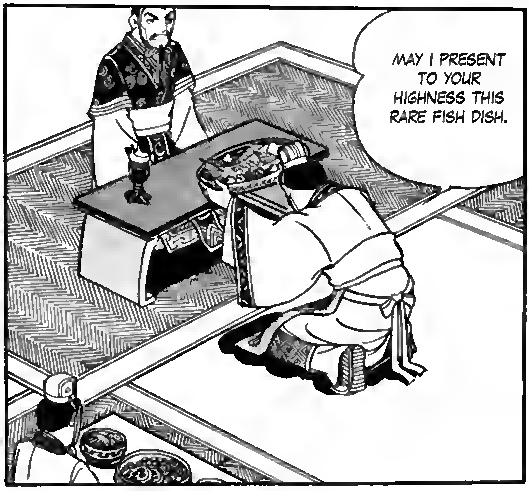
.....

.....

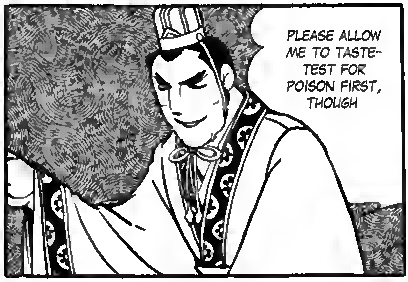
YES, SIR
ZHUAN ZHU .. BRING OUT THE FISH.
YES, SIR
I'LL SEND THE SIGNAL TO THE TROOPS IMMEDIATELY.
12





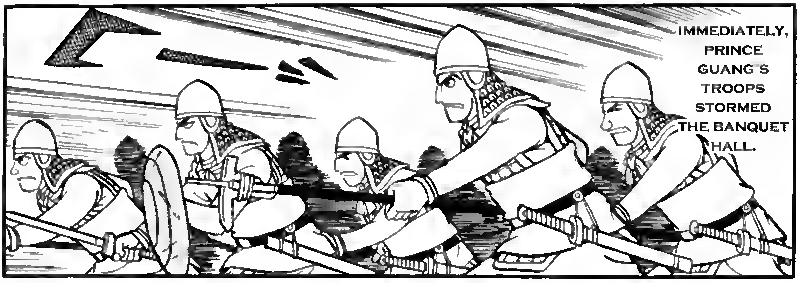

MAY I PRESENT TO YOUR HIGHNESS THIS RARE FISH DISH.

13

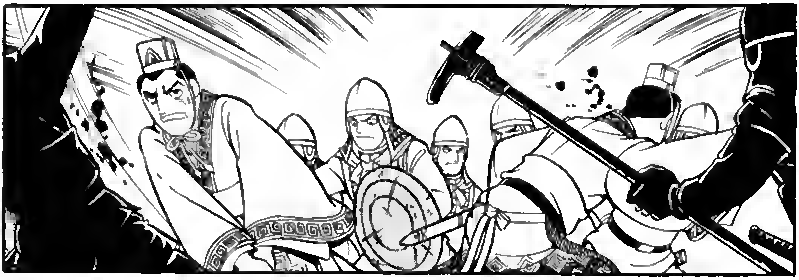

PLEASE ALLOW ME TO TASTE-TEST FOR POISON FIRST, THOUGH

AH, IT LOOKS AWFULLY DELICIOUS.

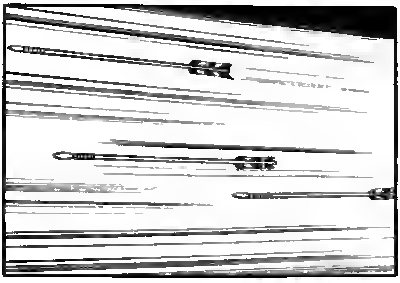
ZHUAN ZHU ONLY NARROWLY BEAT THE BODYGUARD'S SLASHES BY A FRACTION OF A SECOND TO SUCCESSFULLY PIERCE THE KING'S CHEST.

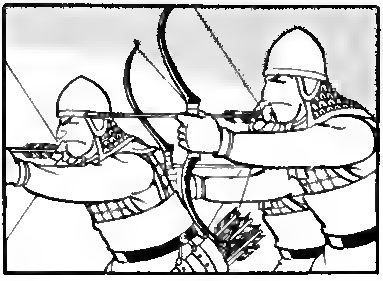

IMMEDIATELY, PRINCE GUANG'S TROOPS STORMED THE BANQUET HALL.

DAMN IT!

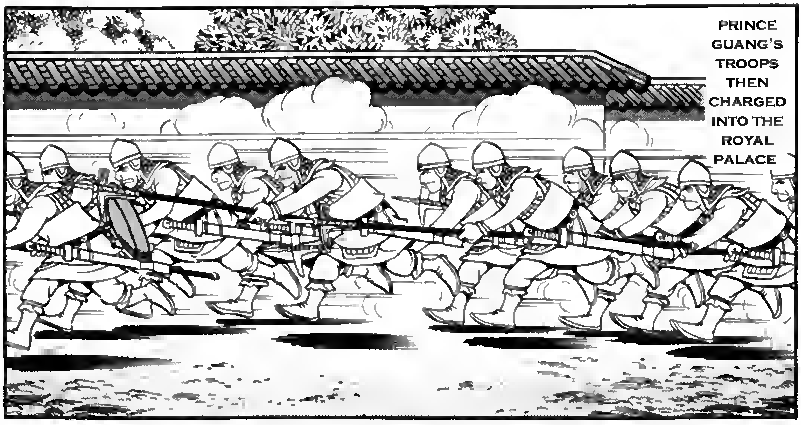


15

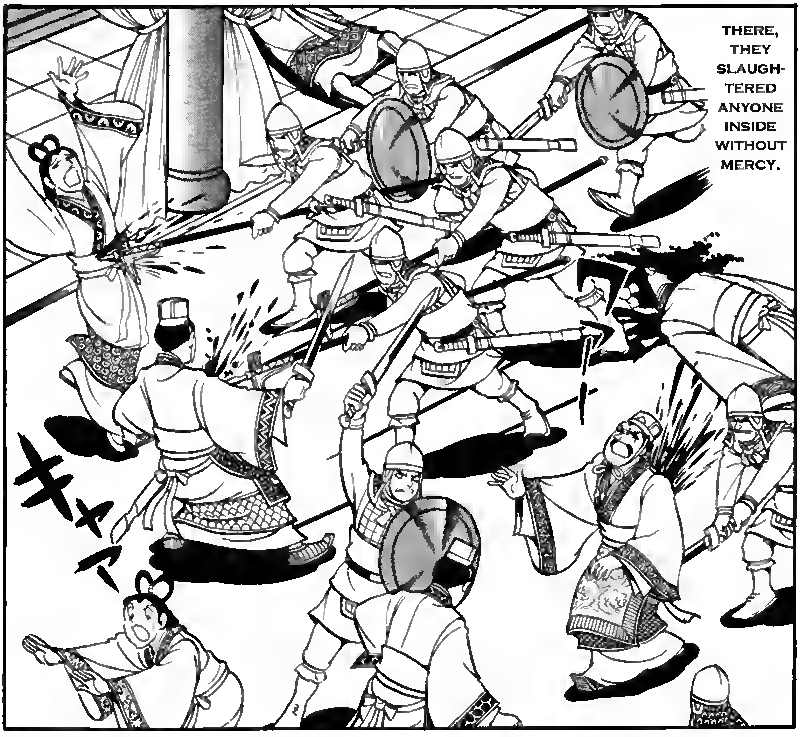


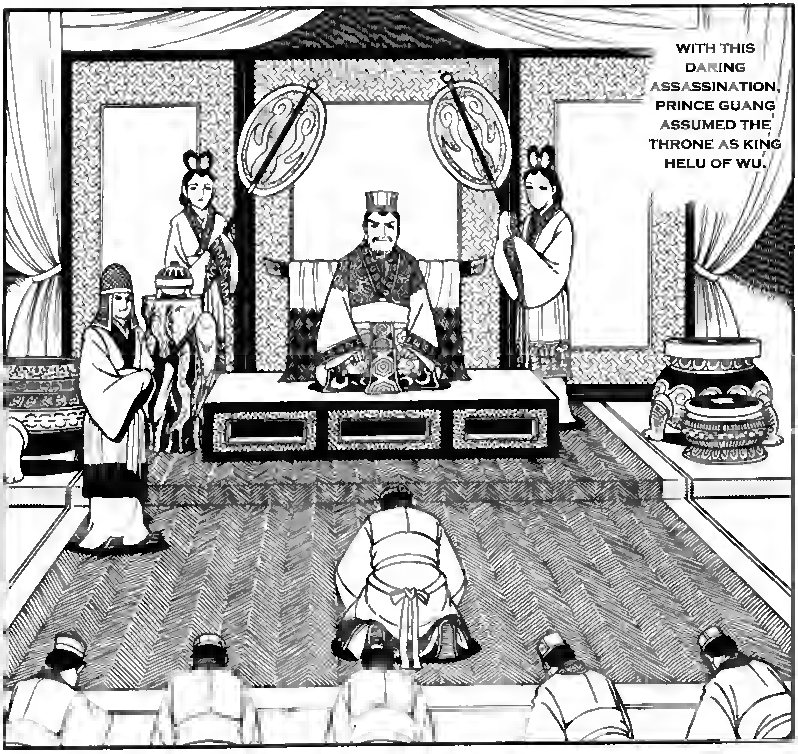


AGHH!
UGHH!
16
THE LUXURIOUS BANQUET HALL WAS TRANSFORMED INTO A HELLISH BLOODBATH


PRINCE GUANG'S TROOPS THEN CHARGED INTO THE ROYAL PALACE

17


THERE, THEY SLAUGHTERED ANYONE INSIDE WITHOUT MERCY.
キャー

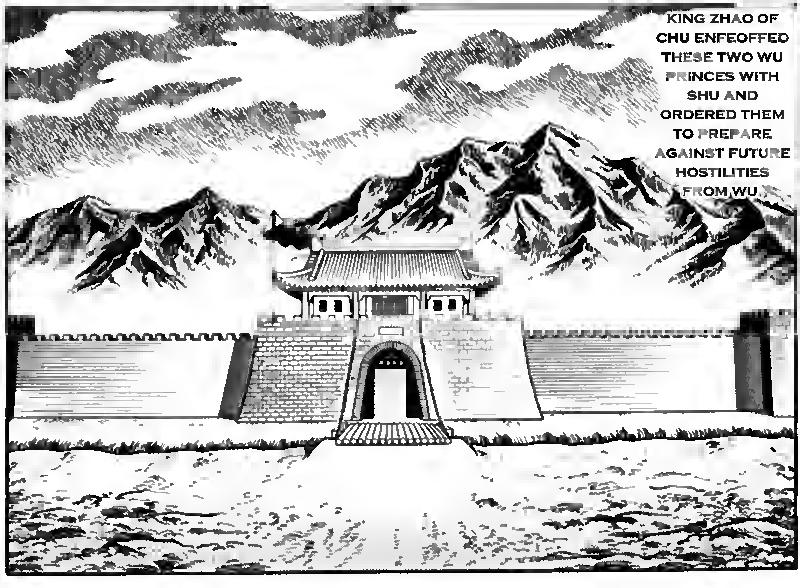

WITH THIS DARING ASSASSINATION, PRINCE GUANG ASSUMED THE THRONE AS KING HELU OF WU.

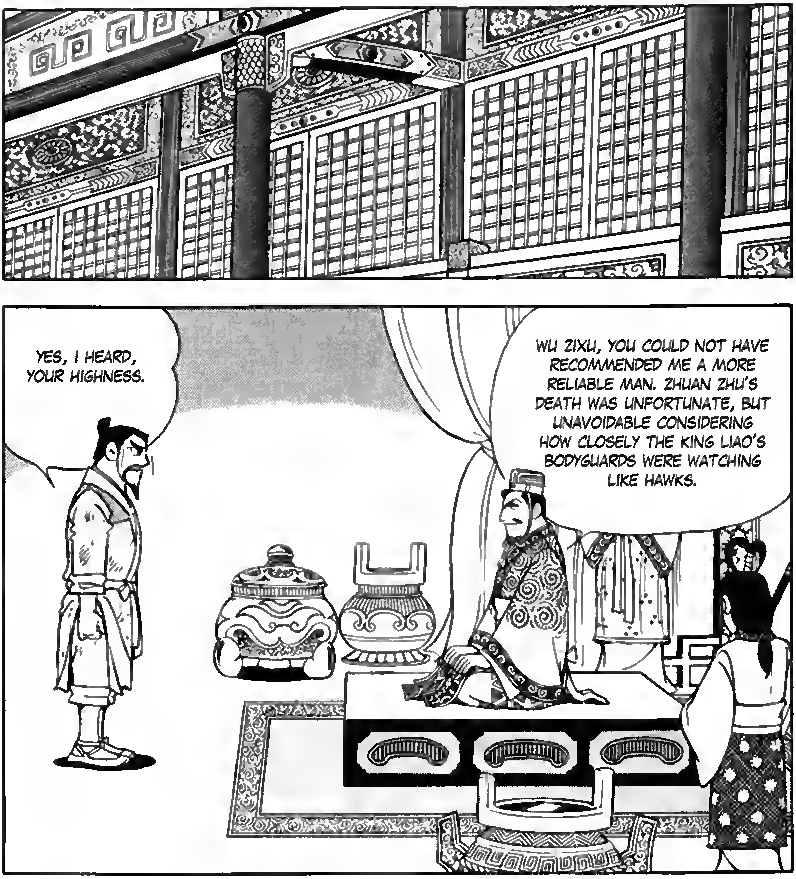
18

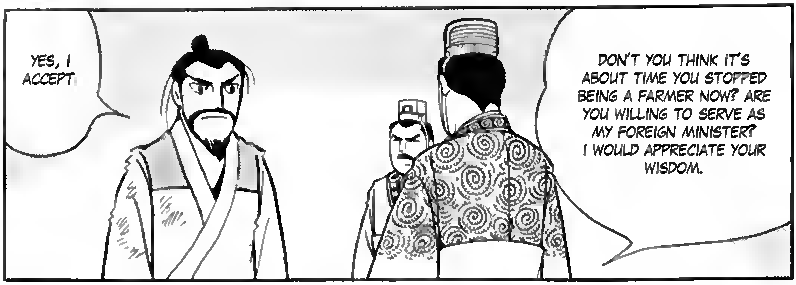
NEWS OF THE COUP D'ETAT WAS IMMEDIATELY RELAYED TO PRINCES GAIYU AND ZHUYOUNG STILL TRAPPED IN CHU.

WITHOUT A SAFE HOME TO RETURN TO NOW, THE TWO PRINCES DECIDED TO SURRENDER TO CHU INSTEAD
楚軍

19


KING ZHAO OF CHU ENFEOFFED THESE TWO WU PRINCES WITH SHU AND ORDERED THEM TO PREPARE AGAINST FUTURE HOSTILITIES FROM WU

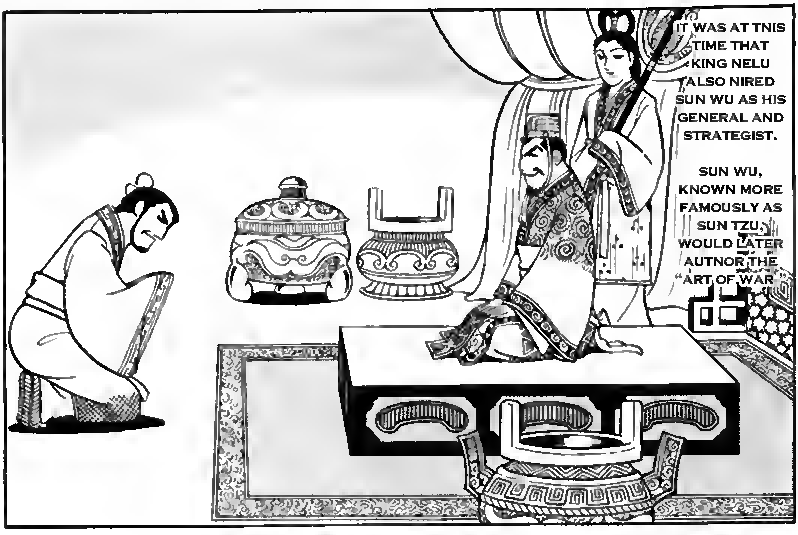

YES, I HEARD, YOUR HIGHNESS.
WU ZIXU, YOU COULD NOT HAVE RECOMMENDED ME A MORE RELIABLE MAN. ZHUAN ZHU'S DEATH WAS UNFORTUNATE, BUT UNAVOIDABLE CONSIDERING HOW CLOSELY THE KING LIAO'S BODYGUARDS WERE WATCHING LIKE HAWKS.
20
I'M SURE ZHUAN ZHU IS SATISFIED THEN IN THE UNDERWORLD.
OF COURSE, I ENNOBLED ZHUAN ZHU'S SON FOR HIS FATHER'S SERVICE.


YES, I ACCEPT.
DON'T YOU THINK IT'S ABOUT TIME YOU STOPPED BEING A FARMER NOW? ARE YOU WILLING TO SERVE AS MY FOREIGN MINISTER? I WOULD APPRECIATE YOUR WISDOM.

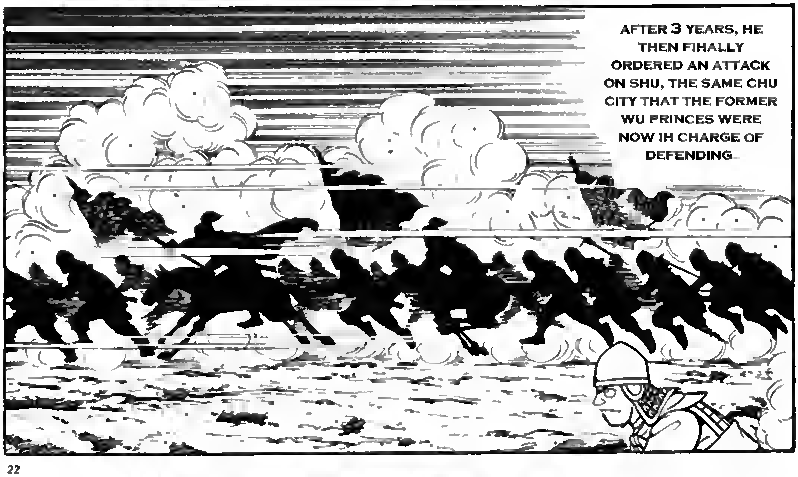
CERTAINLY, YOUR HIGHNESS.

THEN LET US WORK TOGETHER IN MAKING WU THE NEW HEGEMON STATE.

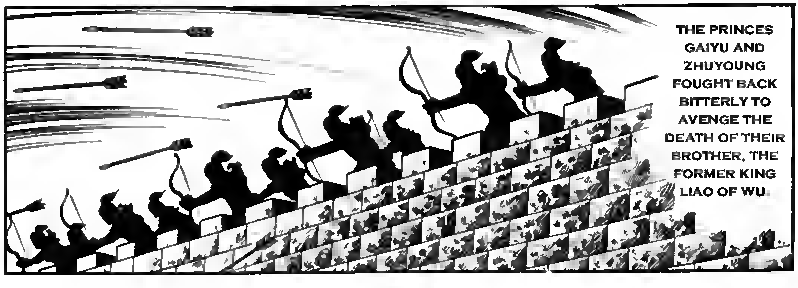
21

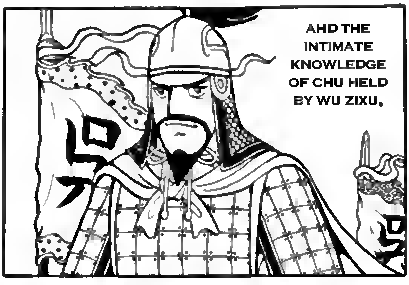

IT WAS AT THIS TIME THAT KING NELU ALSO HIRED SUN WU AS HIS GENERAL AND STRATEGIST.
SUN WU, KNOWN MORE FAMOUSLY AS SUN TZU, WOULD LATER AUTHOR THE "ART OF WAR."

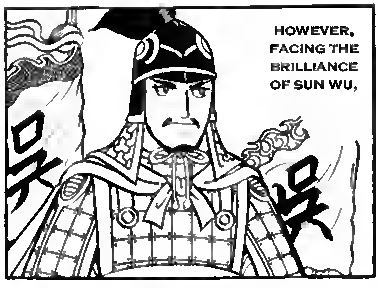
KING HELU FIRST DEVOTED HIS ATTENTION ON STABILIZ-IHG WU'S REALM


AFTER 3 YEARS, HE THEN FIHALLY ORDERED AN ATTACK ON SHU, THE SAME CHU CITY THAT THE FORMER WU PRINCES WERE NOW IH CHARGE OF DEFENDING.

22

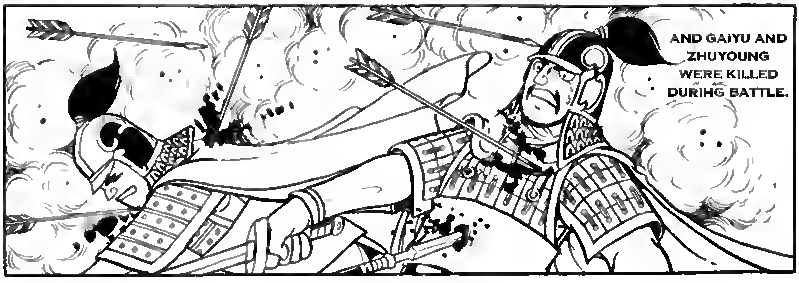

THE PRINCES GAIYU AND ZHUYOUNG FOUGHT BACK BITTERLY TO AVENGE THE DEATH OF THEIR BROTHER, THE FORMER KING LIAO OF WU.

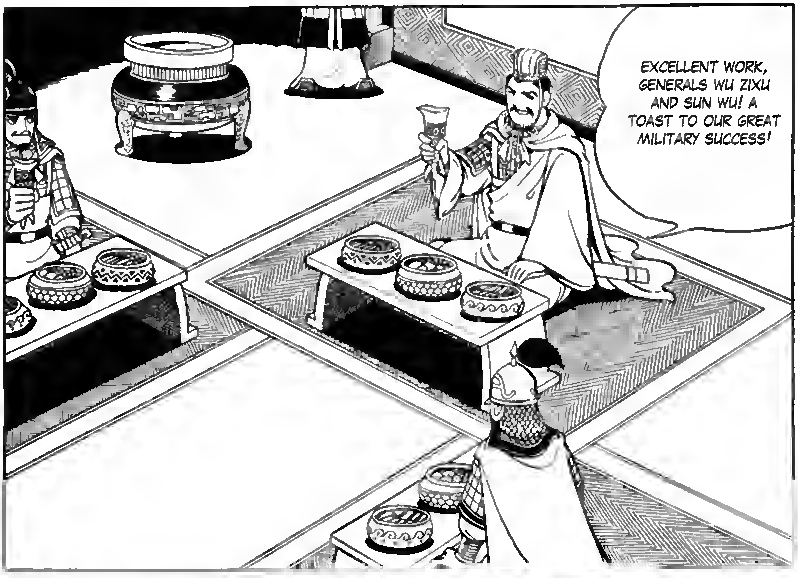

AND THE INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE OF CHU HELD BY WU ZIXU,


HOWEVER, FACING THE BRILLIANCE OF SUN WU,

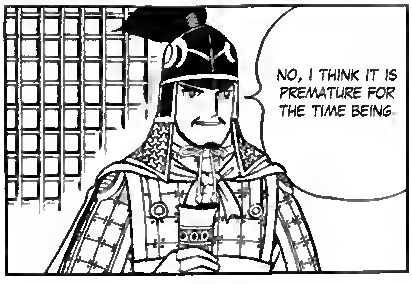
THE CITY OF SHU FELL,

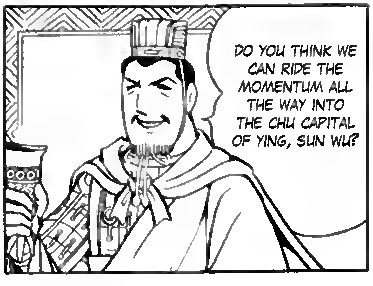
23


AND GAIYU AND ZHUYOUNG WERE KILLED DURING BATTLE.

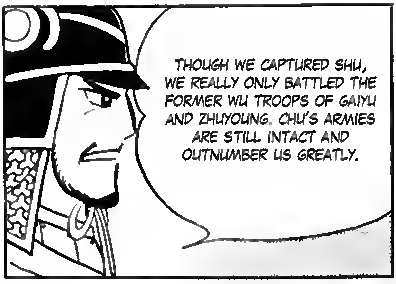

EXCELLENT WORK, GENERALS WU ZIXU AND SUN WU! A TOAST TO OUR GREAT MILITARY SUCCESS!

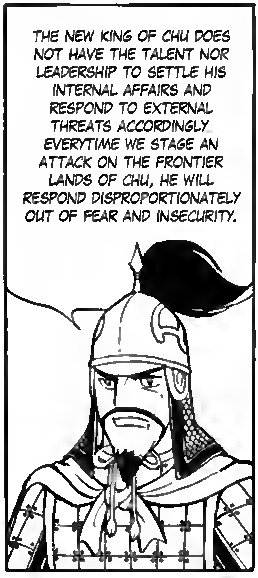
24


NO, I THINK IT IS PREMATURE FOR THE TIME BEING.


DO YOU THINK WE CAN RIDE THE MOMENTUM ALL THE WAY INTO THE CHU CAPITAL OF YING, SUN WU?

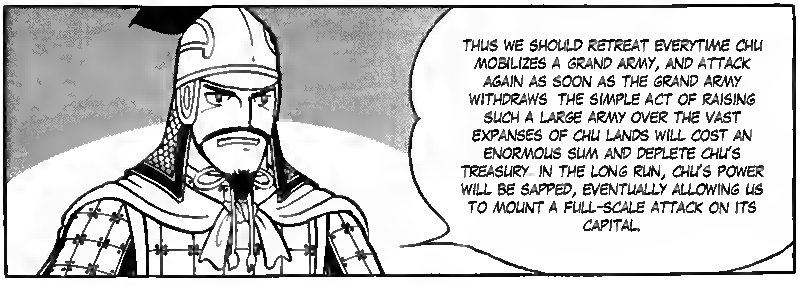
AND WHAT ABOUT YOU, WU ZIXU?

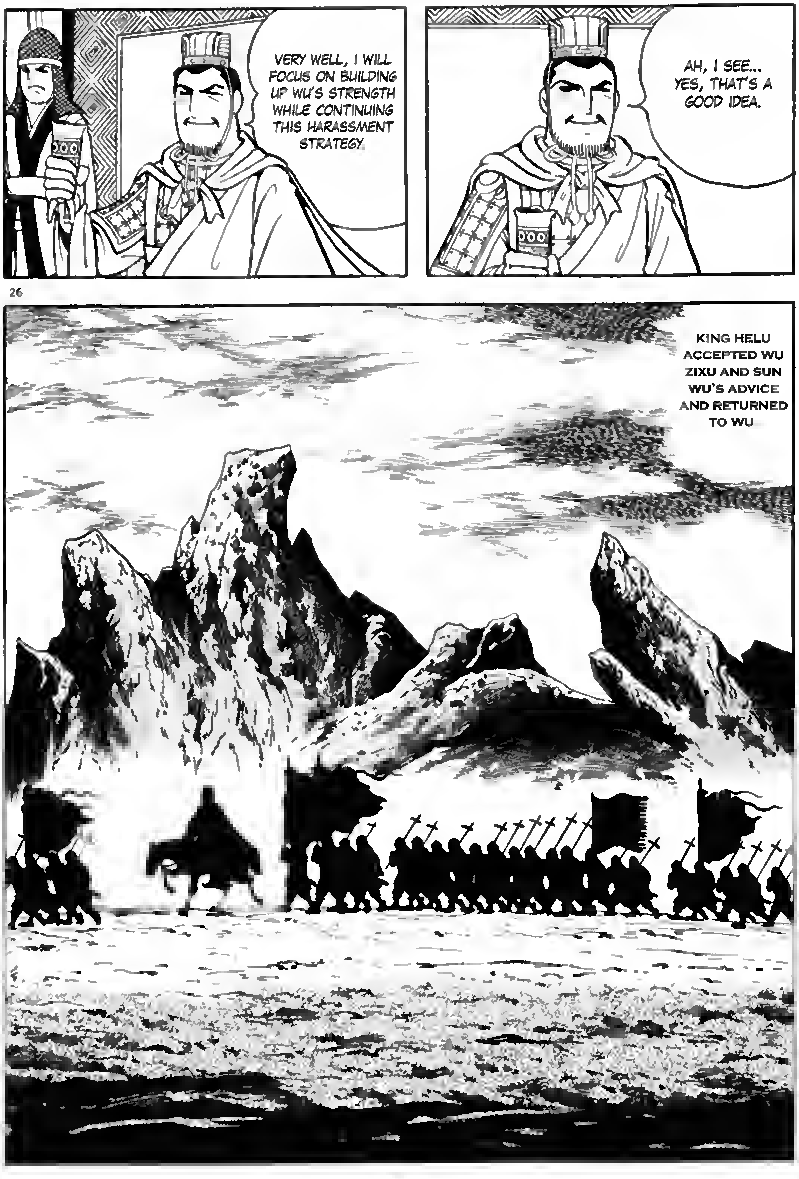

THOUGH WE CAPTURED SHU, WE REALLY ONLY BATTLED THE FORMER WU TROOPS OF GAIYU AND ZHUYOUNG. CHU'S ARMIES ARE STILL INTACT AND OUTNUMBER US GREATLY.

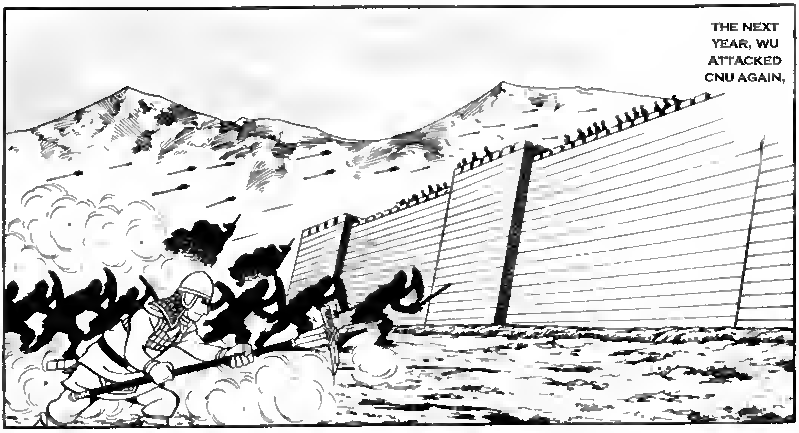

THE NEW KING OF CHU DOES NOT HAVE THE TALENT NOR LEADERSHIP TO SETTLE HIS INTERNAL AFFAIRS AND RESPOND TO EXTERNAL THREATS ACCORDINGLY. EVERYTIME WE STAGE AN ATTACK ON THE FRONTIER LANDS OF CHU, HE WILL RESPOND DISPROPORTIONATELY OUT OF FEAR AND INSECURITY.

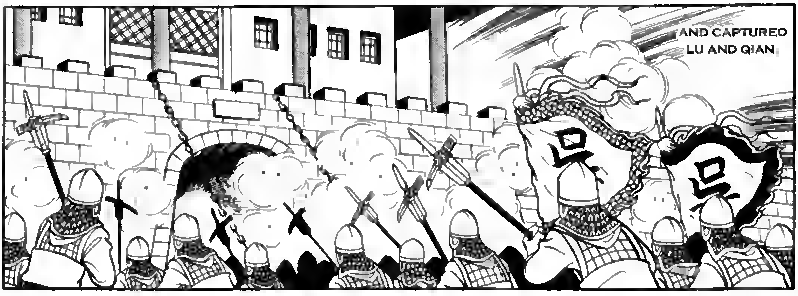
OH..?
IT IS AS SUN WU SAYS. I HATE TO ADMIT IT, BUT WE DO NOT HAVE THE STRENGTH TO SEIZE CHU'S CAPITAL YET. WE SHOULD FOCUS ON WEAKENING CHU BIT BY BIT FOR NOW

25


THUS WE SHOULD RETREAT EVERYTIME CHU MOBILIZES A GRAND ARMY, AND ATTACK AGAIN AS SOON AS THE GRAND ARMY WITHDRAWS. THE SIMPLE ACT OF RAISING SUCH A LARGE ARMY OVER THE VAST EXPANSES OF CHU LANDS WILL COST AN ENORMOUS SUM AND DEPLETE CHU'S TREASURY. IN THE LONG RUN, CHU'S POWER WILL BE SAPPED, EVENTUALLY ALLOWING US TO MOUNT A FULL-SCALE ATTACK ON ITS CAPITAL.


VERY WELL, I WILL FOCUS ON BUILDING UP WU'S STRENGTH WHILE CONTINUING THIS HARASSMENT STRATEGY.
AH, I SEE... YES, THAT'S A GOOD IDEA.
KING HELU ACCEPTED WU ZIXU AND SUN WU'S ADVICE AND RETURNED TO WU





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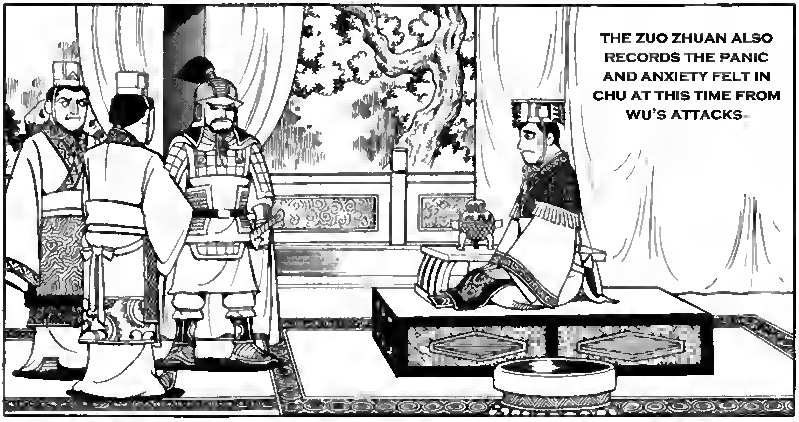
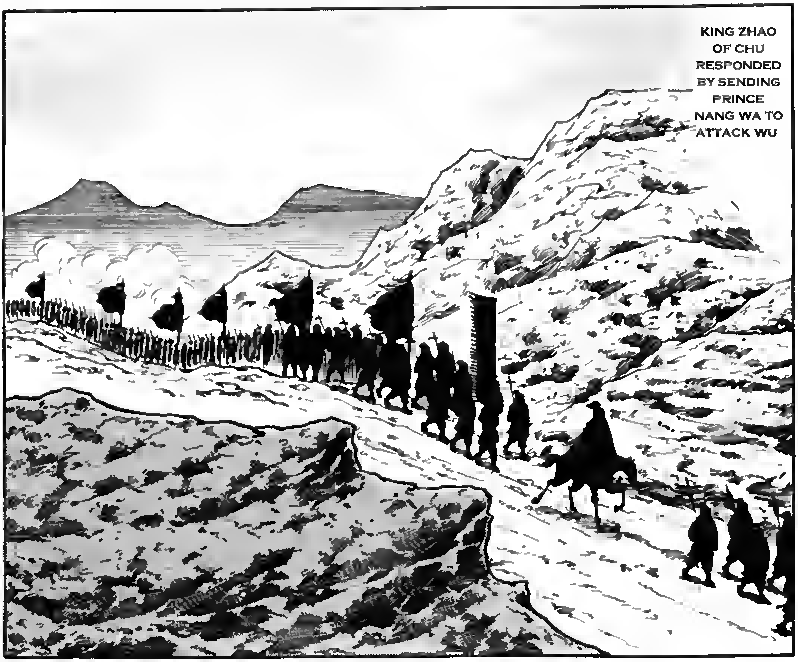
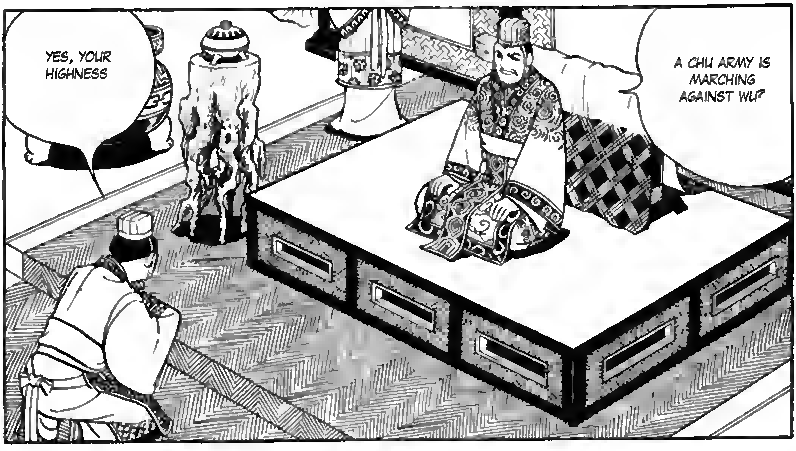


*ZUO ZNUAN: A COMMENTARY OF THE ANCIENT CNINESE CHRONICLE, SPRING ANO AUTUMN ANNALS, WHICN GIVES MORE BACKGROUNO ANO LIVELY NARRATIVES OF VARIOUS RELATEO EVENTS. IT THUS SERVES AS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT TEXTS ON THE SPRING AND AUTUMN ERA


KING ZHAO OF CHU RESPONDED BY SENDING PRINCE NANG WA TO ATTACK WU

28


YES, YOUR HIGHNESS
A CHU ARMY IS MARCHING AGAINST WU?

NANG WA..
GENERAL NANG WA
WHO'S THE ENEMY COMMANDER?
PLEASE ALLOW ME TO BEAT HIM BACK, YOUR HIGHNESS!
YES, HE'S A RATHER EGOTISTICAL MAN OF RASH TEMPERAMENT
DOES ANYONE KNOW HIM..?
I'LL GLADLY LEAVE IT TO YOU THEN
29
WU ZIXU MARCHED FORTH TO MEET THE CHU ARMY
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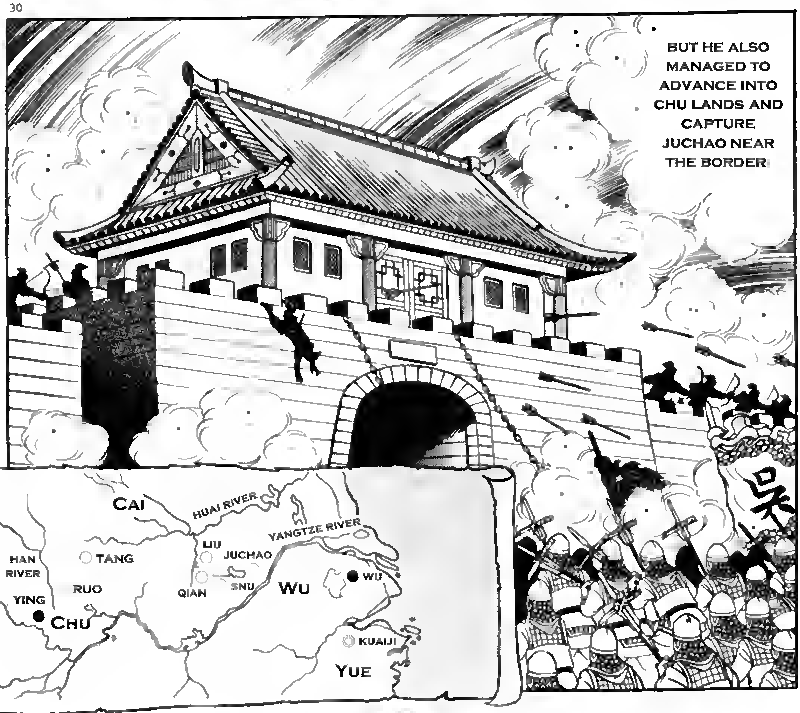
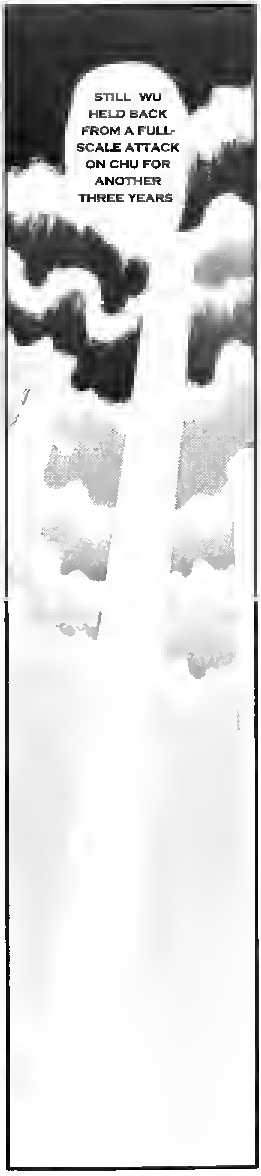
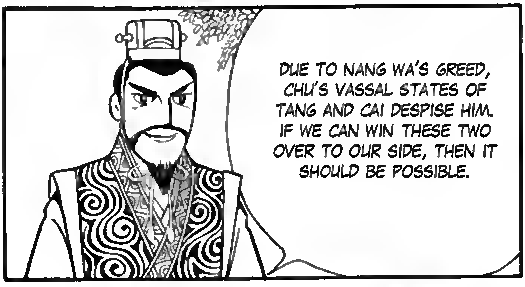
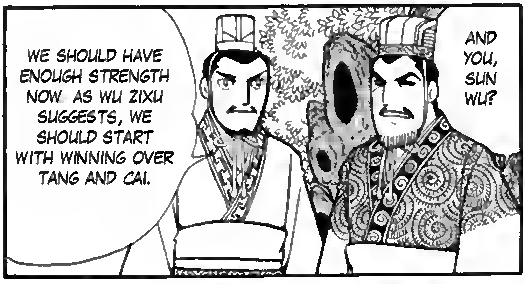
NOT ONLY DID WU ZIXU HANDILY DEFEAT THE CHU FORCES,
吳


BUT HE ALSO MANAGED TO ADVANCE INTO CHU LANDS AND CAPTURE JUCHAO NEAR THE BORDER.
吳
CAI
HUAI RIVER
YANGTZE RIVER
LIU
JUCHAO
HAN RIVER
TANG
WU
YING
RUO
QIAN
SHU
WU
CHU
KUAIJI
YUE

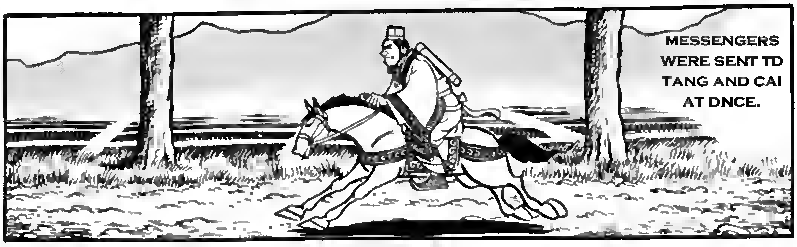
SIX YEARS AGO, YOU TWO SAID IT WAS STILL TOO EARLY TO TAKE CHU'S CAPITAL BUT WHAT ABOUT NOW...?

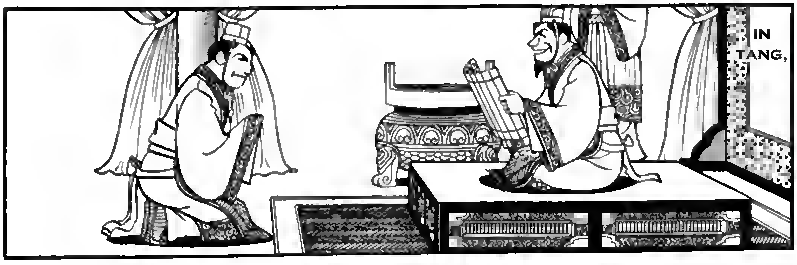

STILL WU HELD BACK FROM A FULL-SCALE ATTACK ON CHU FOR ANOTHER THREE YEARS


DUE TO NANG WA'S GREED, CHU'S VASSAL STATES OF TANG AND CAI DESPISE HIM. IF WE CAN WIN THESE TWO OVER TO OUR SIDE, THEN IT SHOULD BE POSSIBLE.

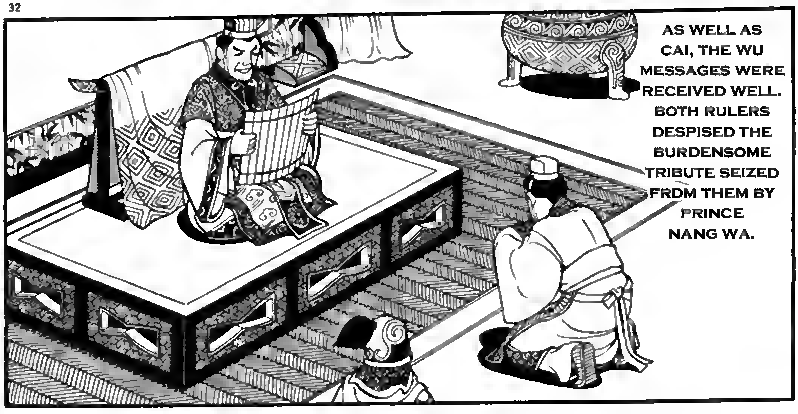

WE SHOULD HAVE ENOUGH STRENGTH NOW. AS WU ZIXU SUGGESTS, WE SHOULD START WITH WINNING OVER TANG AND CAI.
AND YOU, SUN WU?

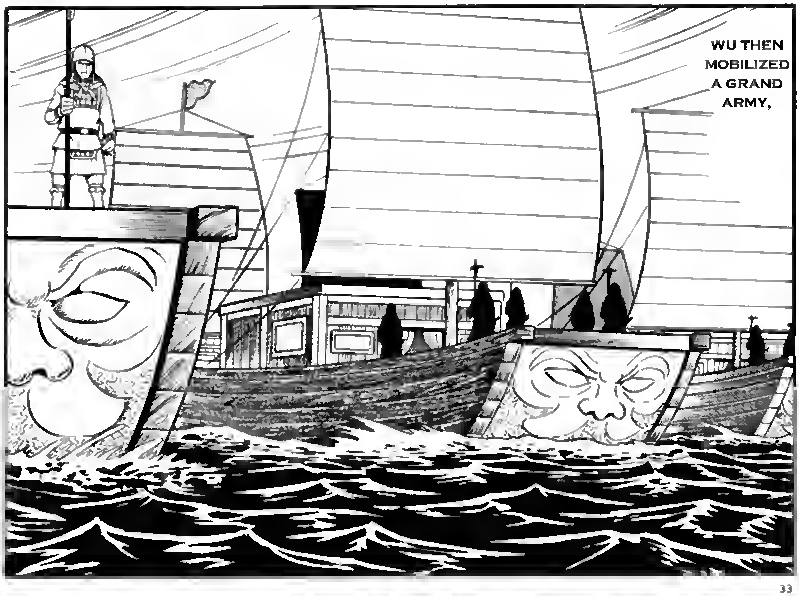
YES, YOUR HIGHNESS.
VERY WELL, LET US CARRY OUT THAT STRATEGY.


MESSENGERS WERE SENT TO TANG AND CAI AT ONCE.

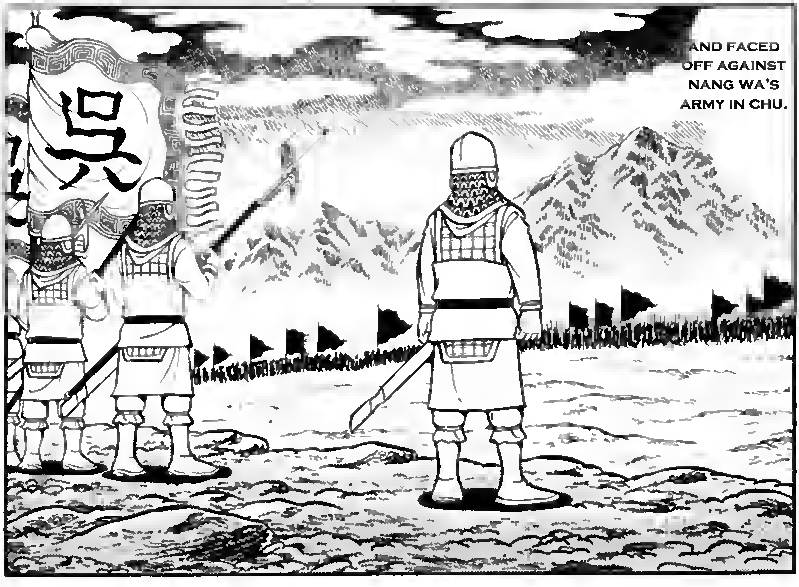

IN TANG,

32


AS WELL AS CAI, THE WU MESSAGES WERE RECEIVED WELL. BOTH RULERS DESPISED THE BURDENSOME TRIBUTE SEIZED FROM THEM BY PRINCE NANG WA.


WU THEN MOBILIZED A GRAND ARMY,

33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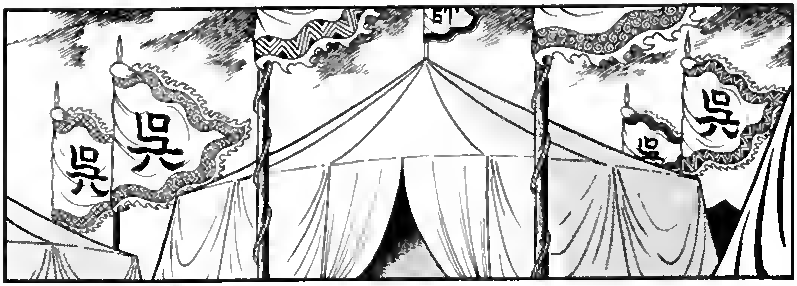
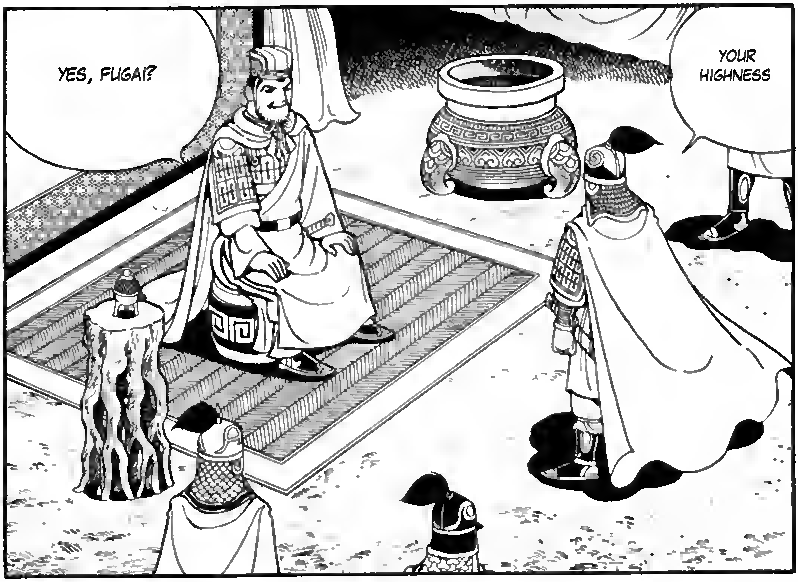
AND FACED OFF AGAINST NANG WA'S ARMY IN CHU.

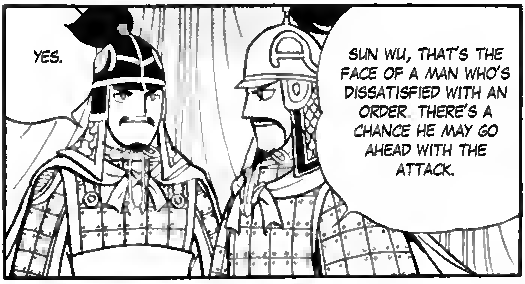


*FUGAI IS KING HELU'S YOUNGER BROTHER

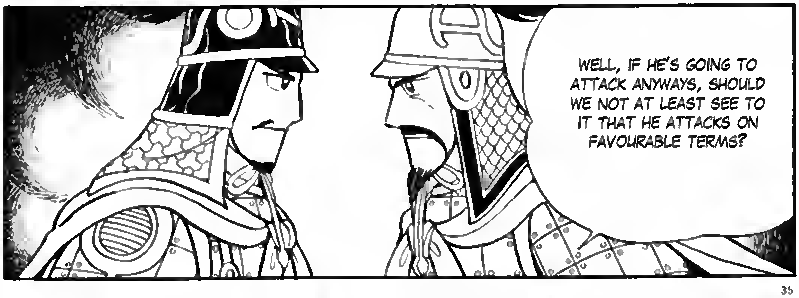


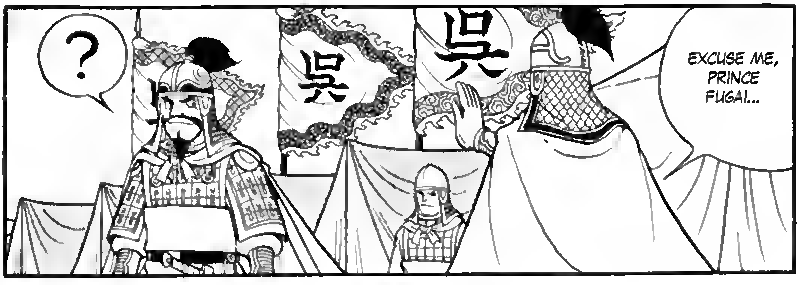
I'M AFRAID NOT. THE CHU ARMY IS CONSIDERABLY LARGE. IT'S BEST TO WAIT FOR TANG AND CAI'S FORCES TO ARRIVE BEFORE GOING ON THE OFFENSIVE.

THERE ARE TIMES WHEN THAT IS TRUE BUT YOU ARE TO WAIT FOR THE TIME BEING
DID YOU NOT GIVE ME 5000 TROOPS TO COMMAND AS I SEE FIT? IN BATTLE, SHOULD AN OFFICER NOT SHOW INITIATIVE WHEN HE SEES AN OPENING INSTEAD OF WAITING FOR ORDERS TO COME DOWN THROUGH THE CHAIN OF COMMAND?


YES.
SUN WU, THAT'S THE FACE OF A MAN WHO'S DISSATISFIED WITH AN ORDER. THERE'S A CHANCE HE MAY GO AHEAD WITH THE ATTACK.

VERY WELL...


WELL, IF HE'S GOING TO ATTACK ANYWAYS, SHOULD WE NOT AT LEAST SEE TO IT THAT HE ATTACKS ON FAVOURABLE TERMS?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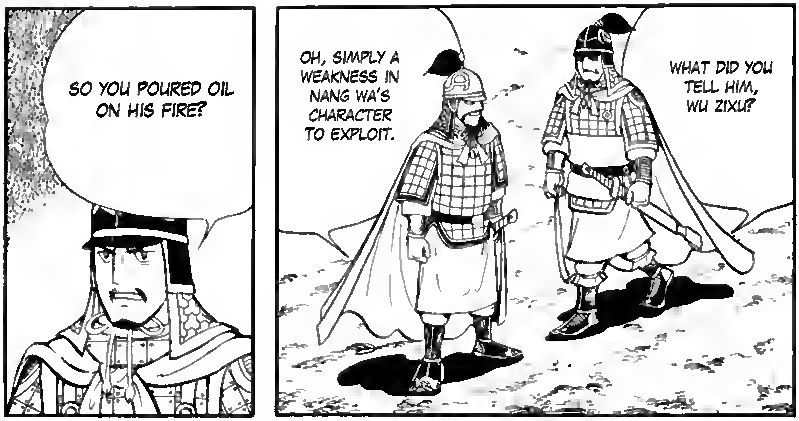
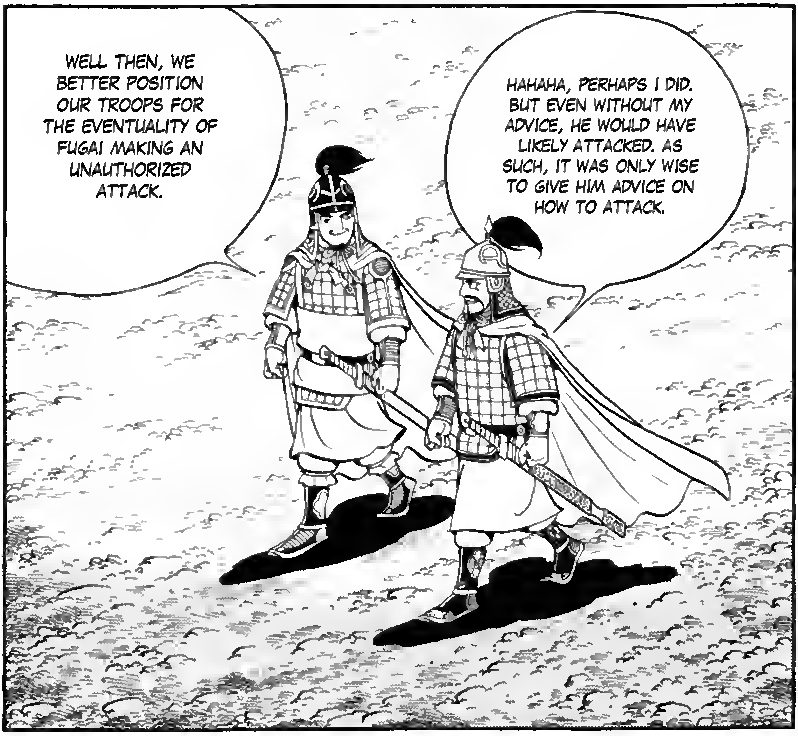
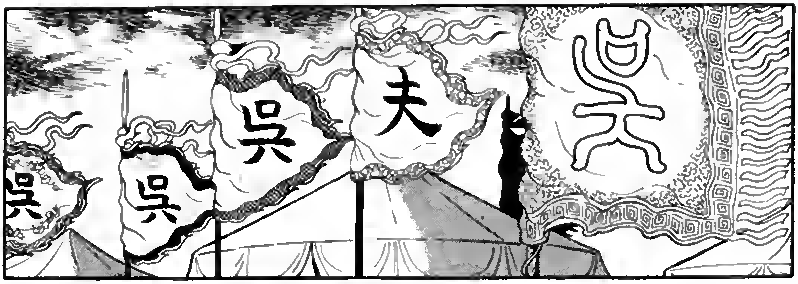
EXCUSE ME, PRINCE FUGAI...

GENERAL NANG WA IS A GREEDY MAN WHO TRIES TO SEIZE CREDIT FOR ANY SUCCESS ONLY FOR HIMSELF. HIS LEADERSHIP FAILS TO INSPIRE HIS MEN, AND THERE ARE FEW, IF ANY, SOLDIERS IN CHU WHO WOULD WILLINGLY DIE FOR HIM.
SURE.
LET ME TELL YOU A USEFUL ADVICE ABOUT THE ENEMY COMMANDER WE'RE FACING.
OH, IS THAT SO...? THANK YOU FOR THE ENLIGHTENING ADVICE.
SO THERE IS NO REASON TO RUSH. VICTORY WILL SURELY BE OURS IN DUE TIME
.....


SO YOU POURED OIL ON HIS FIRE?
OH, SIMPLY A WEAKNESS IN NANG WA'S CHARACTER TO EXPLOIT.
WHAT DID YOU TELL HIM, WU ZIXU?

37


WELL THEN, WE BETTER POSITION OUR TROOPS FOR THE EVENTUALITY OF FUGAI MAKING AN UNAUTHORIZED ATTACK.
HAHAHA, PERHAPS I DID. BUT EVEN WITHOUT MY ADVICE, HE WOULD HAVE LIKELY ATTACKED. AS SUCH, IT WAS ONLY WISE TO GIVE HIM ADVICE ON HOW TO ATTACK.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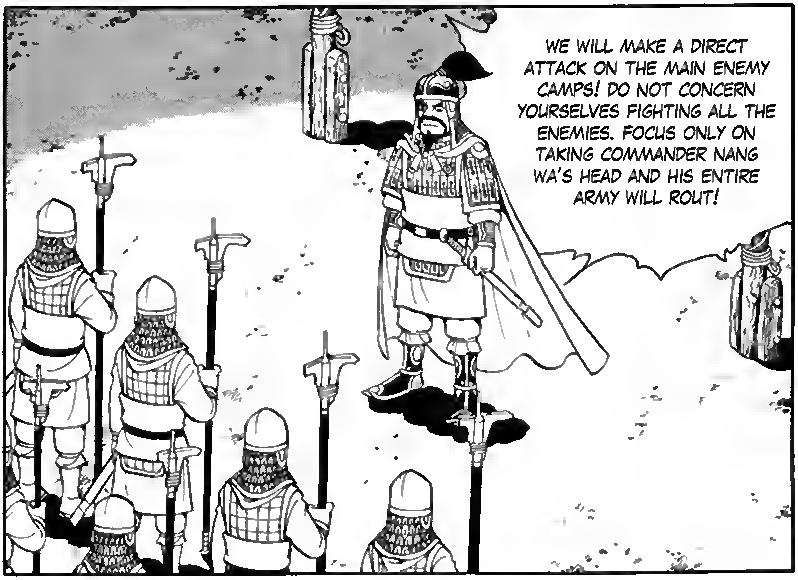
WE WILL MAKE A DIRECT ATTACK ON THE MAIN ENEMY CAMPS! DO NOT CONCERN YOURSELVES FIGHTING ALL THE ENEMIES. FOCUS ONLY ON TAKING COMMANDER NANG WA'S HEAD AND HIS ENTIRE ARMY WILL ROUT!

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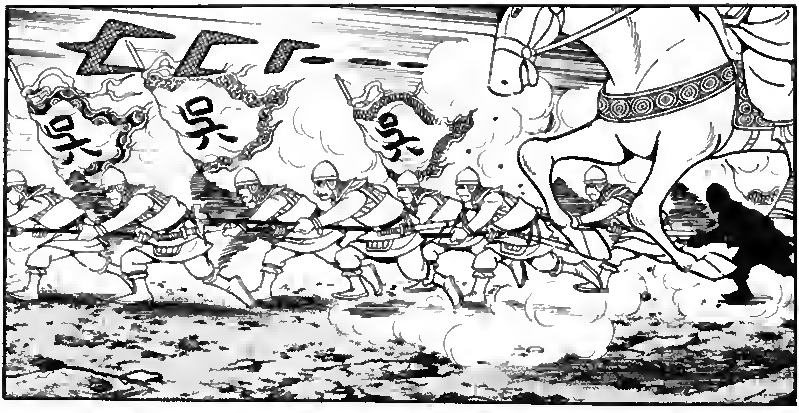
NOW LET US STRIKE!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FUGAI LED A PIERCING DRIVE INTO THE CENTER OF THE MAIN ENEMY CAMPS.
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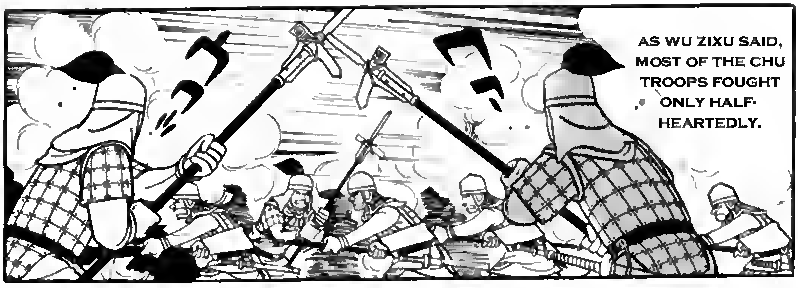
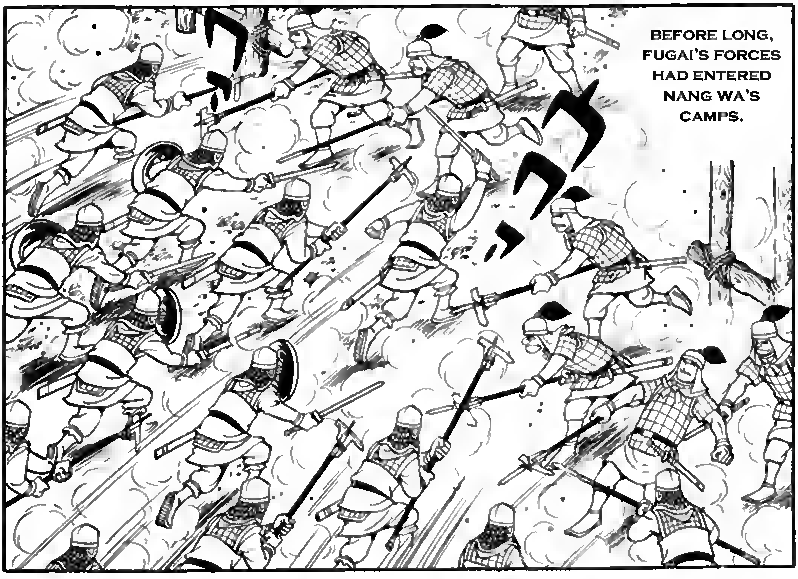

AS WU ZIXU SAID, MOST OF THE CHU TROOPS FOUGHT ONLY HALF-HEARTEDLY.


BEFORE LONG, FUGAI'S FORCES HAD ENTERED NANG WA'S CAMPS.

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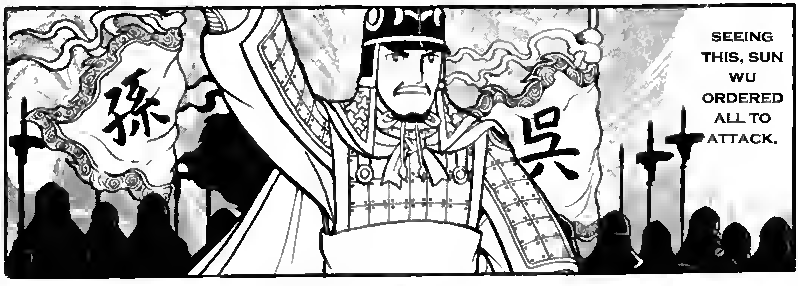
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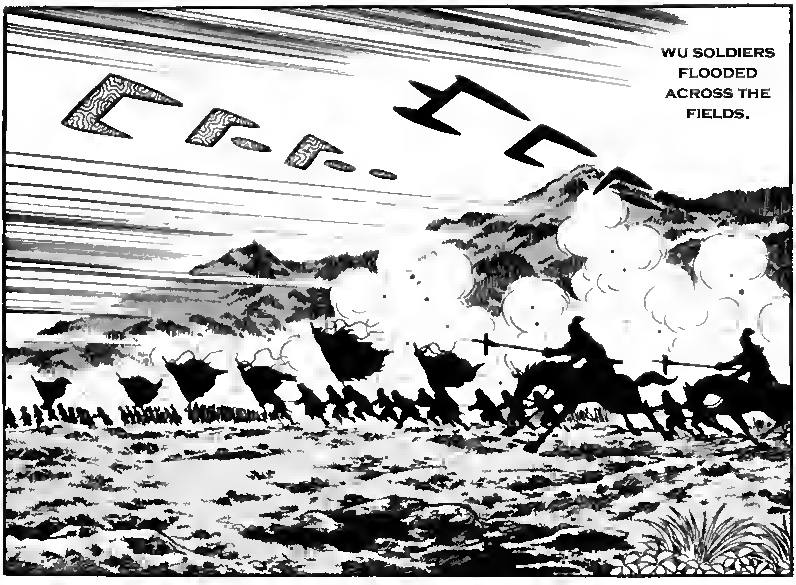
SEEING THIS, SUN WU ORDERED ALL TO ATTACK.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WU SOLDIERS FLOODED ACROSS THE FIELDS.

楚
PANICKED CHU TROOPS BEGAN TO FLEE,

41

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WHICH ONLY GAVE REASON TO WU TROOPS TO INTENSIFY THEIR ATTACK.

QINGFA
RIVER
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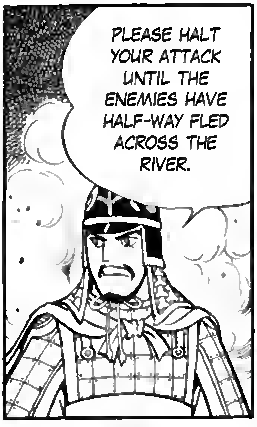
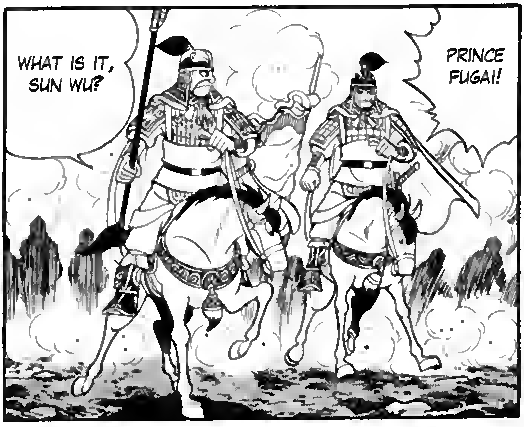
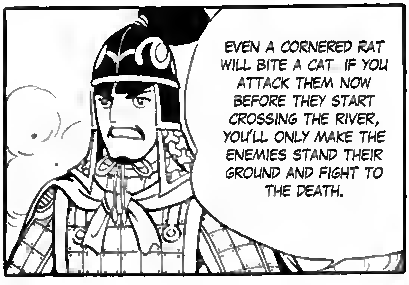
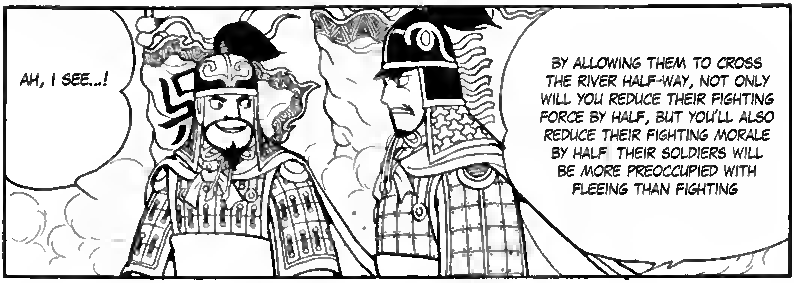
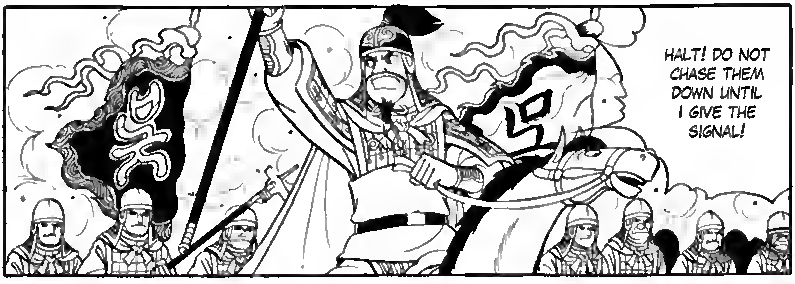

PLEASE HALT YOUR ATTACK UNTIL THE ENEMIES HAVE HALF-WAY FLED ACROSS THE RIVER.


WHAT IS IT, SUN WU?
PRINCE FUGAI!


EVEN A CORNERED RAT WILL BITE A CAT. IF YOU ATTACK THEM NOW BEFORE THEY START CROSSING THE RIVER, YOU'LL ONLY MAKE THE ENEMIES STAND THEIR GROUND AND FIGHT TO THE DEATH.

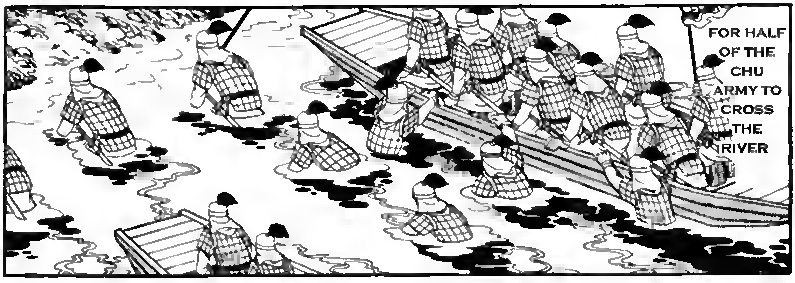
WHAT!? BUT THEY'RE CRUMBLING UNDER OUR PRESSURE RIGHT NOW!

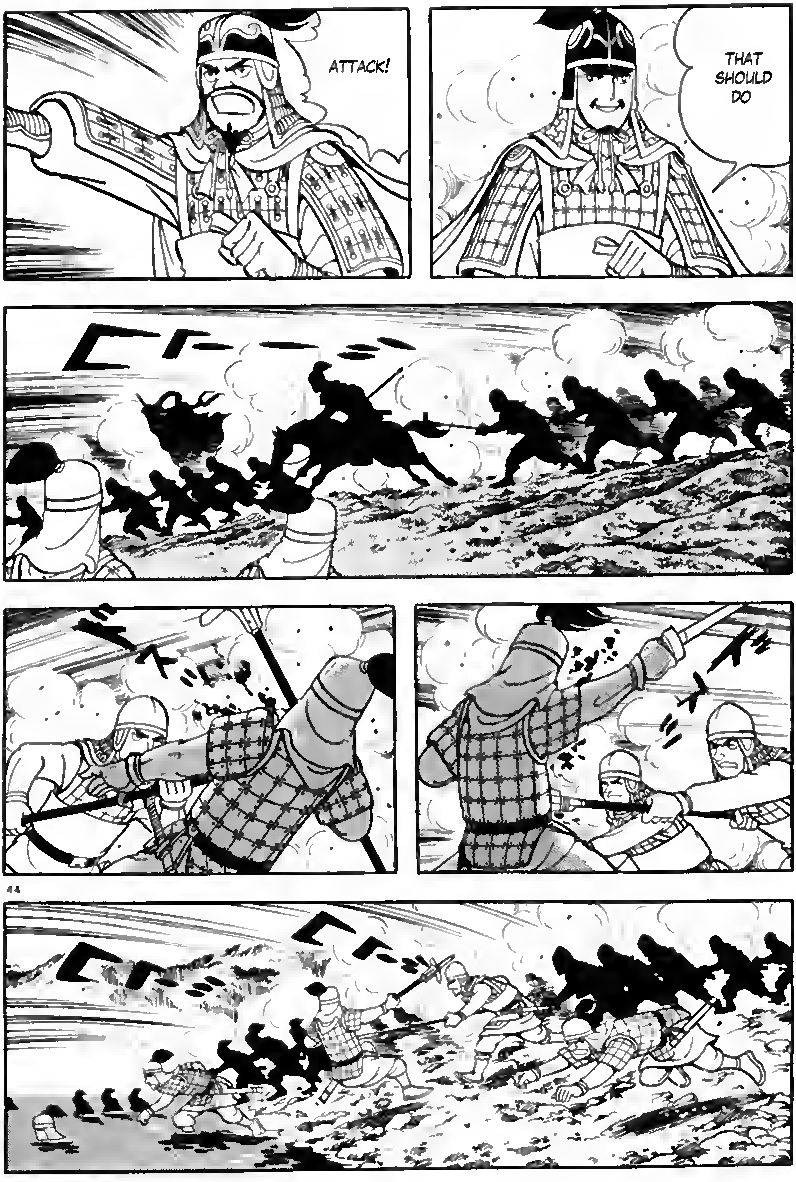

AH, I SEE...!
BY ALLOWING THEM TO CROSS THE RIVER HALF-WAY, NOT ONLY WILL YOU REDUCE THEIR FIGHTING FORCE BY HALF, BUT YOU'LL ALSO REDUCE THEIR FIGHTING MORALE BY HALF. THEIR SOLDIERS WILL BE MORE PREOCCUPIED WITH FLEEING THAN FIGHTING

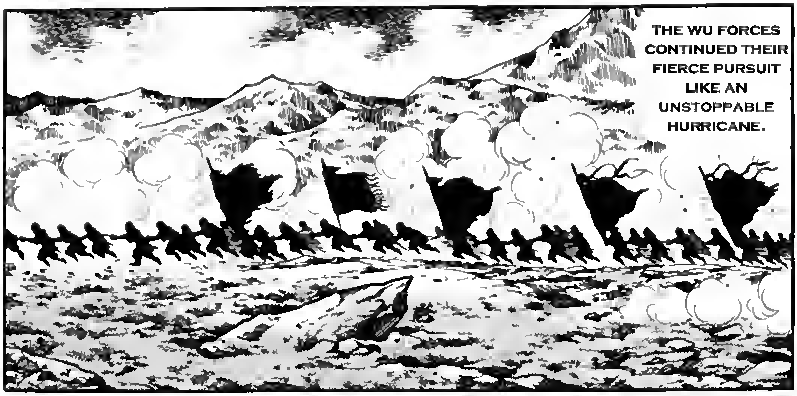

HALT! DO NOT CHASE THEM DOWN UNTIL I GIVE THE SIGNAL!

THE WU FORCES PATIENTLY WAITED.

43


FOR HALF OF THE CHU ARMY TO CROSS THE RIVER


ATTACK!
THAT SHOULD DO


THE WU FORCES CONTINUED THEIR FIERCE PURSUIT LIKE AN UNSTOPPABLE HURRICANE.

THIS BATTLE OF BOJU RESULTED IN A GREAT VICTORY FOR THE WU, AND PROVED SUN WU'S GENIUS AS A MILITARY STRATEGIST.
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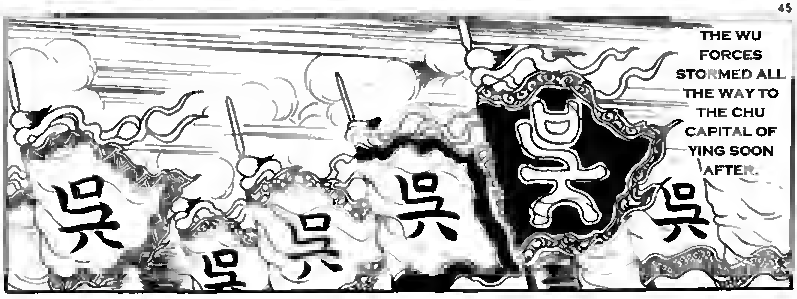
THE WU FORCES STORMED ALL THE WAY TO THE CHU CAPITAL OF YING SOON AFTER.
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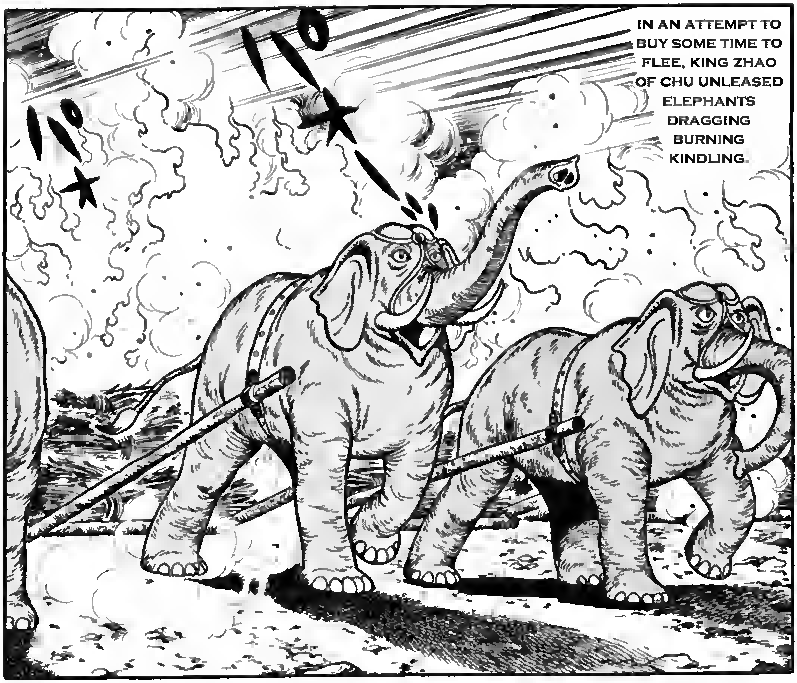
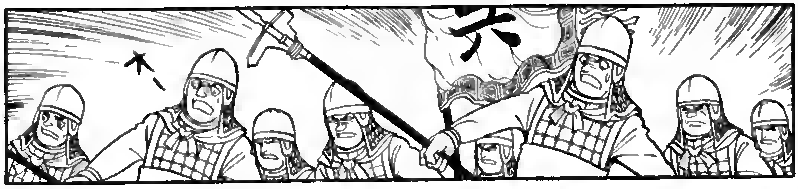

IN AN ATTEMPT TO BUY SOME TIME TO FLEE, KING ZHAO OF CHU UNLEASED ELEPHANTS DRAGGING BURNING KINDLING.



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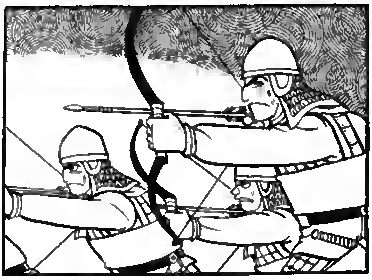
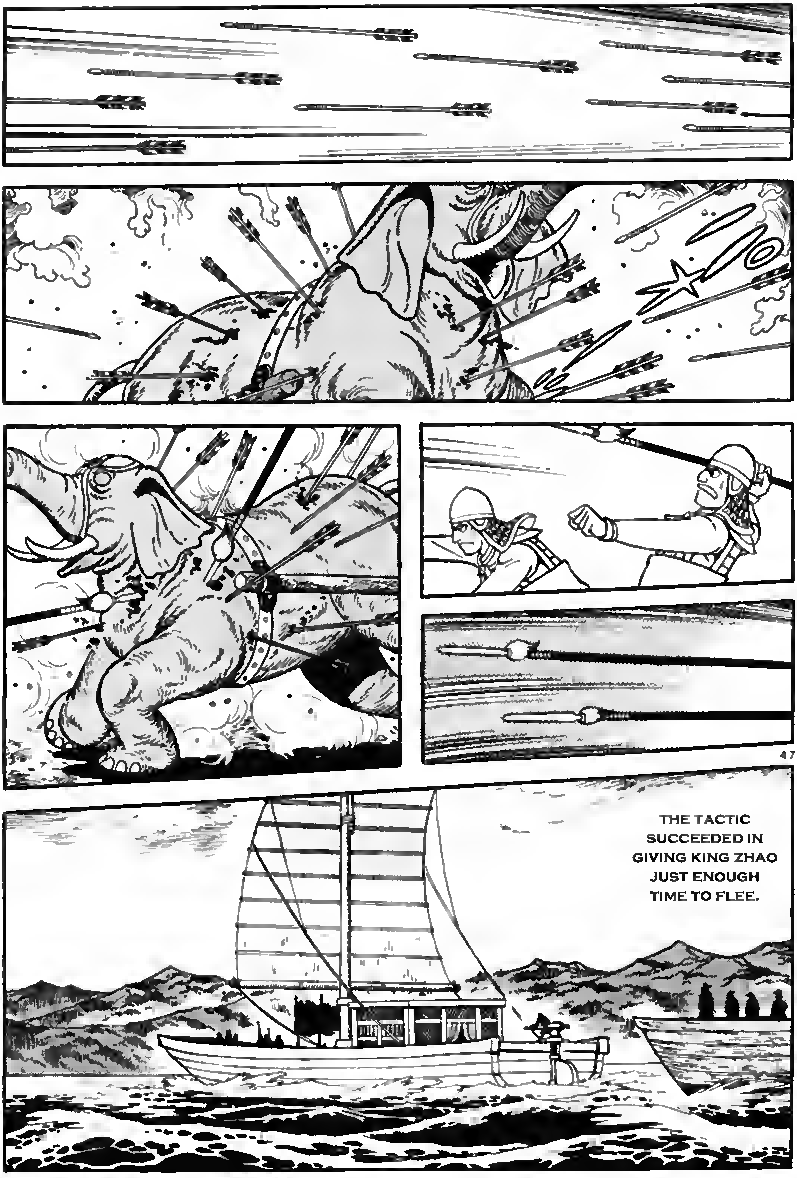
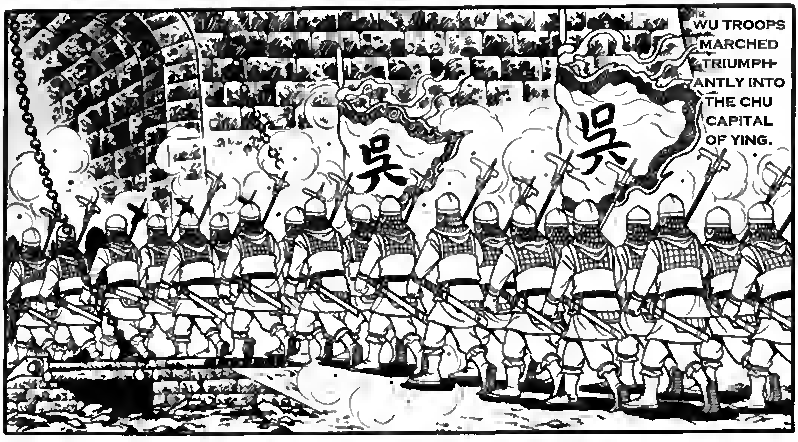



47
THE TACTIC SUCCEEDED IN GIVING KING ZHAO JUST ENOUGH TIME TO FLEE.


WU TROOPS MARCHED TRIUMPHANTLY INTO THE CHU CAPITAL OF YING.
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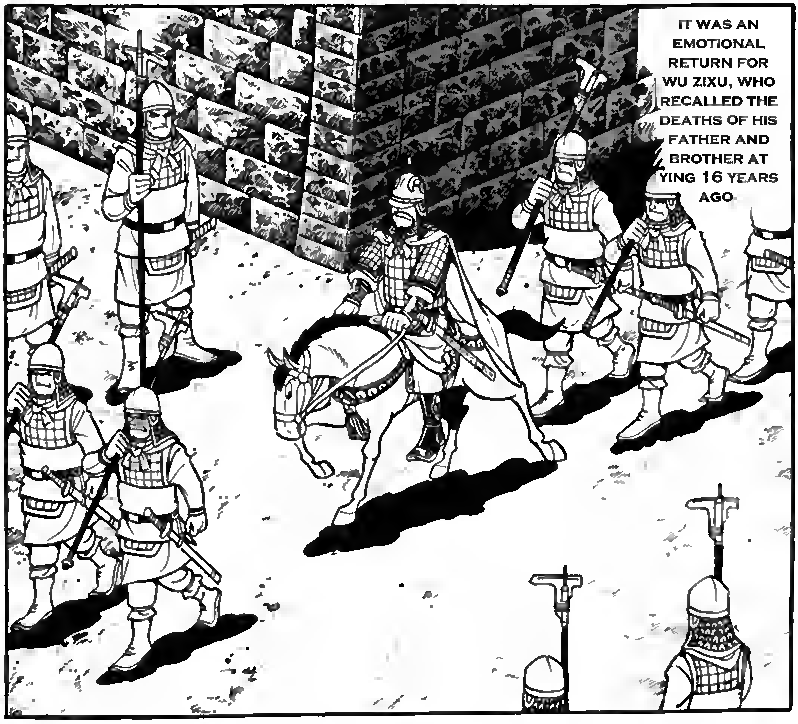
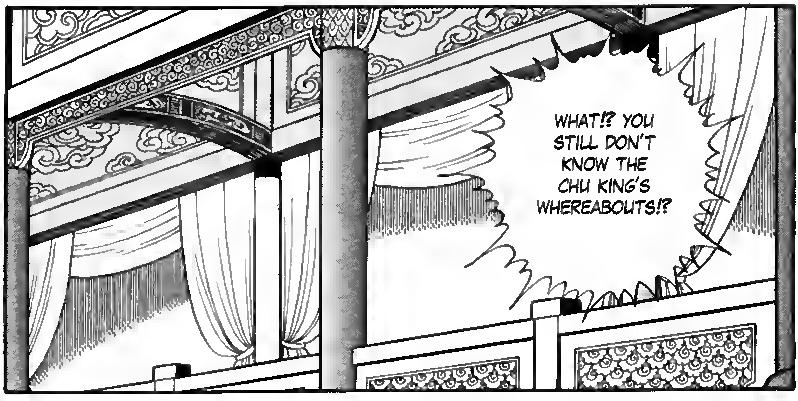
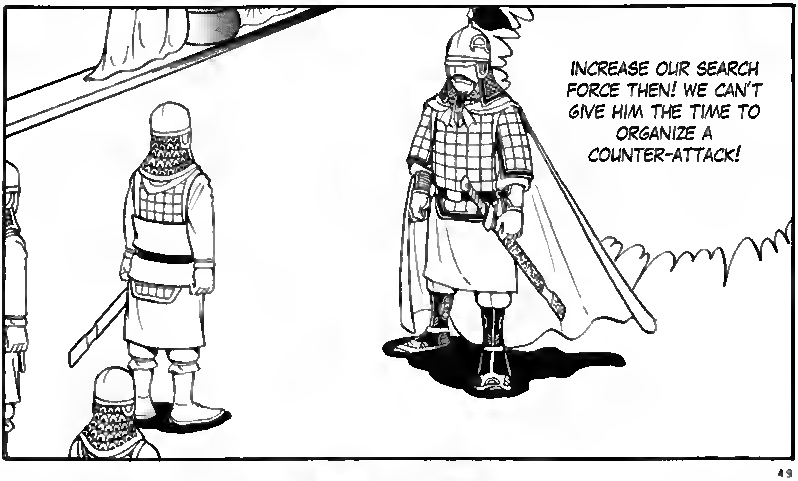

IT WAS AN EMOTIONAL RETURN FOR WU ZIXU, WHO RECALLED THE DEATHS OF HIS FATHER AND BROTHER AT YING 16 YEARS AGO

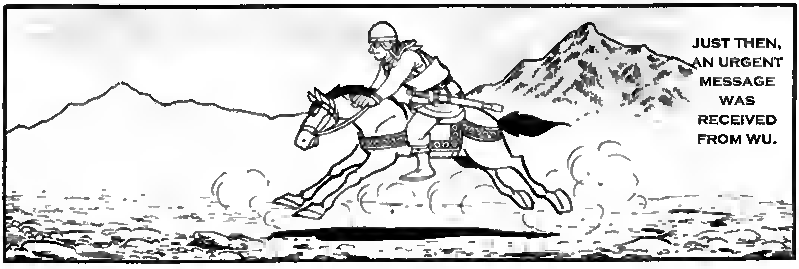

WHAT!? YOU STILL DON'T KNOW THE CHU KING'S WHEREABOUTS!?


INCREASE OUR SEARCH FORCE THEN! WE CAN'T GIVE HIM THE TIME TO ORGANIZE A COUNTER-ATTACK!

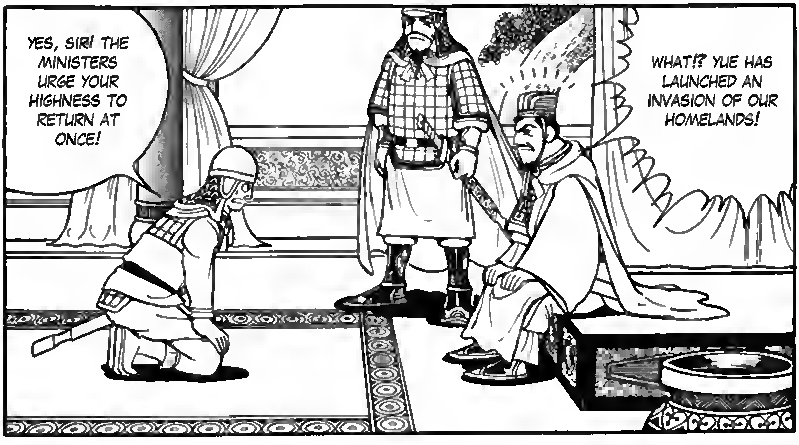
49

AS HE HAD SWORN THE VERY DESTRUCTION OF THE ENTIRE CHU KINGDOM, WU ZIXU WAS NOT SATISFIED WITH THE CAPTURE OF THE CHU CAPITAL ALONE.
EVEN TNOUGN YING HAD BEEN CAPTURED, WU ZIXU KNEW THERE WERE STILL MANY INTACT CNU TROOPS IN OTHER REGIONS OF THE KINGDOM WHICH KING ZHAO COULD USE

BUT FINDING THE KING WAS NOT EASY IN THE VAST LANDS OF CHU.

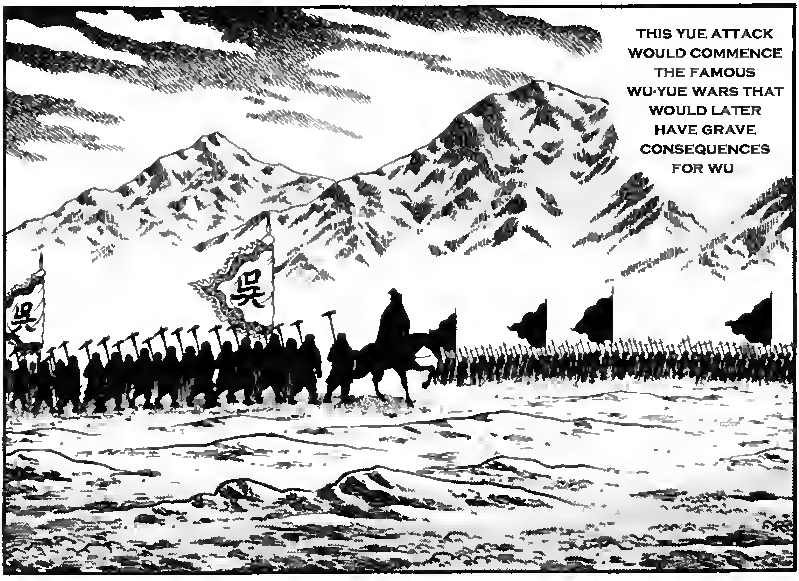

JUST THEN, AN URGENT MESSAGE WAS RECEIVED FROM WU.

50

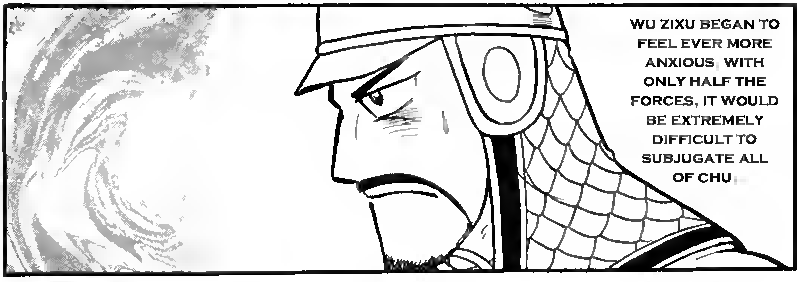

YES, SIR! THE MINISTERS URGE YOUR HIGHNESS TO RETURN AT ONCE!
WHAT!? YUE HAS LAUNCHED AN INVASION OF OUR HOMELANDS!

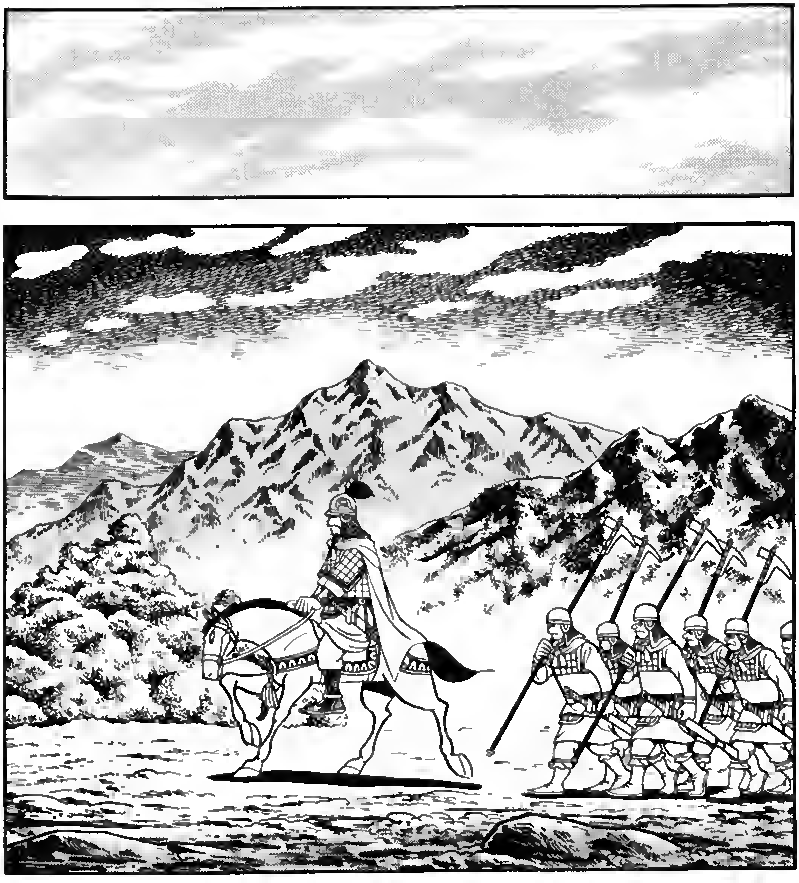
FINE, I WILL SEND HALF OUR FORCES BACK TO WU FOR NOW!

DAMN IT.. IF WE WITHDRAW NOW, THEN CHU WILL REGAIN ITS STRENGTH ONCE MORE .!

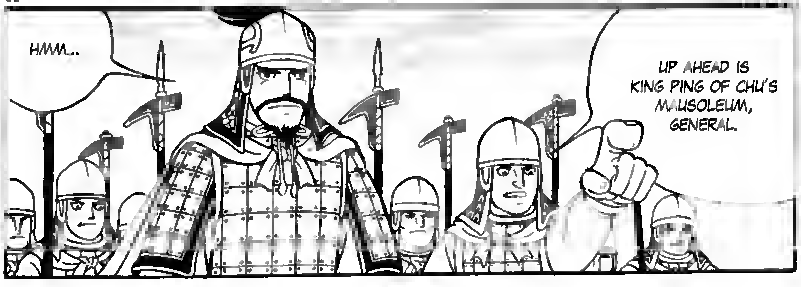

THIS YUE ATTACK WOULD COMMENCE THE FAMOUS WU-YUE WARS THAT WOULD LATER HAVE GRAVE CONSEQUENCES FOR WU
吳
吳

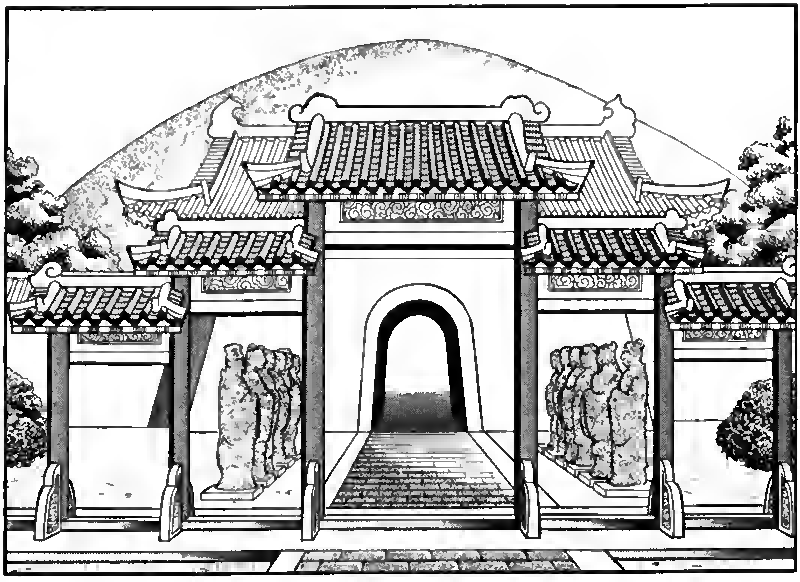
51

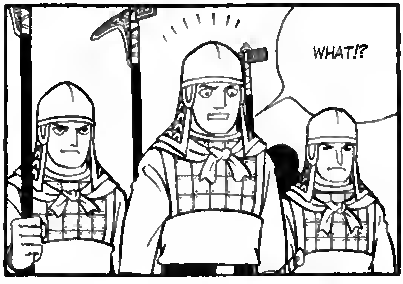

WU ZIXU BEGAN TO FEEL EVER MORE ANXIOUS. WITH ONLY HALF THE FORCES, IT WOULD BE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO SUBJUGATE ALL OF CHU.



52

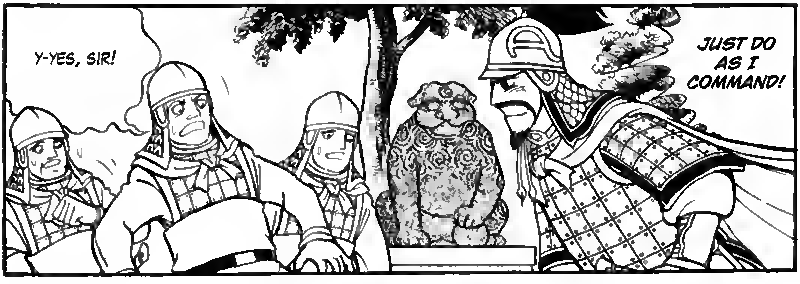


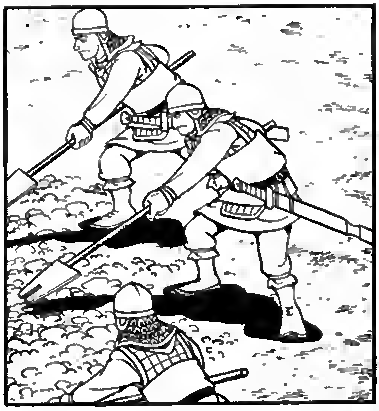



WHAT!?

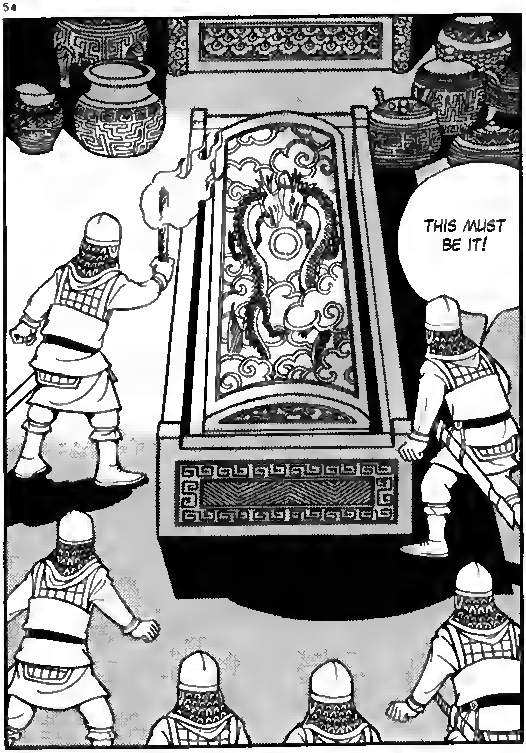
I ORDER YOU TO DEFILE THIS MAUSOLEUM AND DRAG OUT KING PING'S COFFIN!

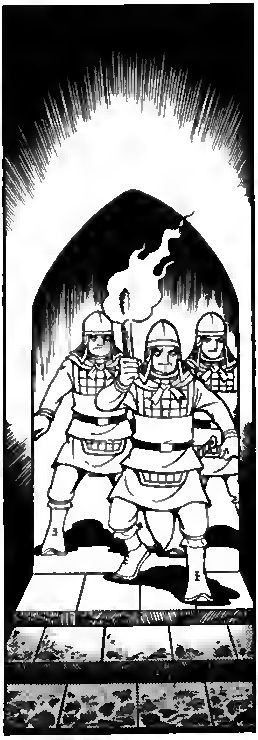
53

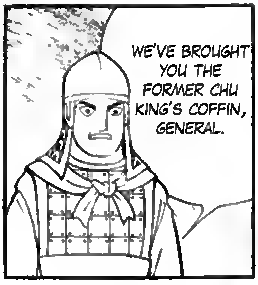

Y-YES, SIR!
JUST DO AS I COMMAND!

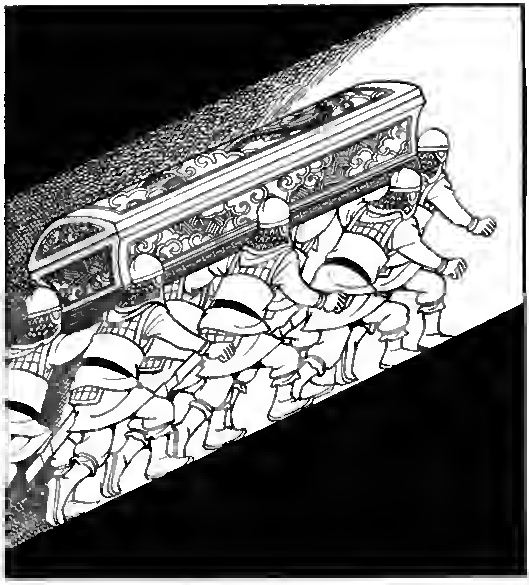


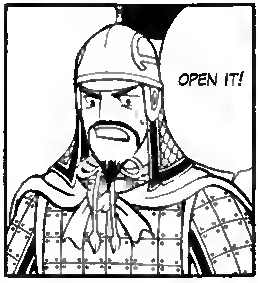
54

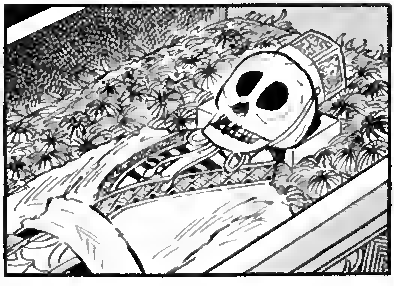


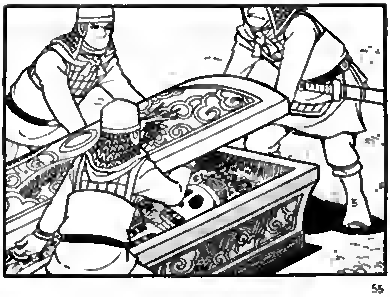



WE'VE BROUGHT YOU THE FORMER CHU KING'S COFFIN, GENERAL.




OPEN IT!





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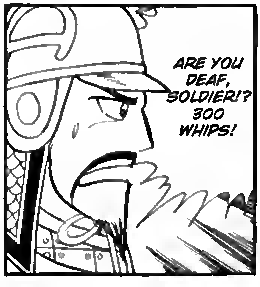
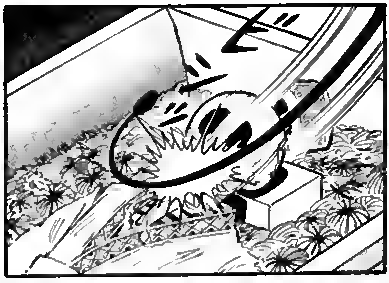

ARE YOU DEAF, SOLDIER!? 300 WHIPS!

T-THREE HUNDRED WHAT, SIR!?

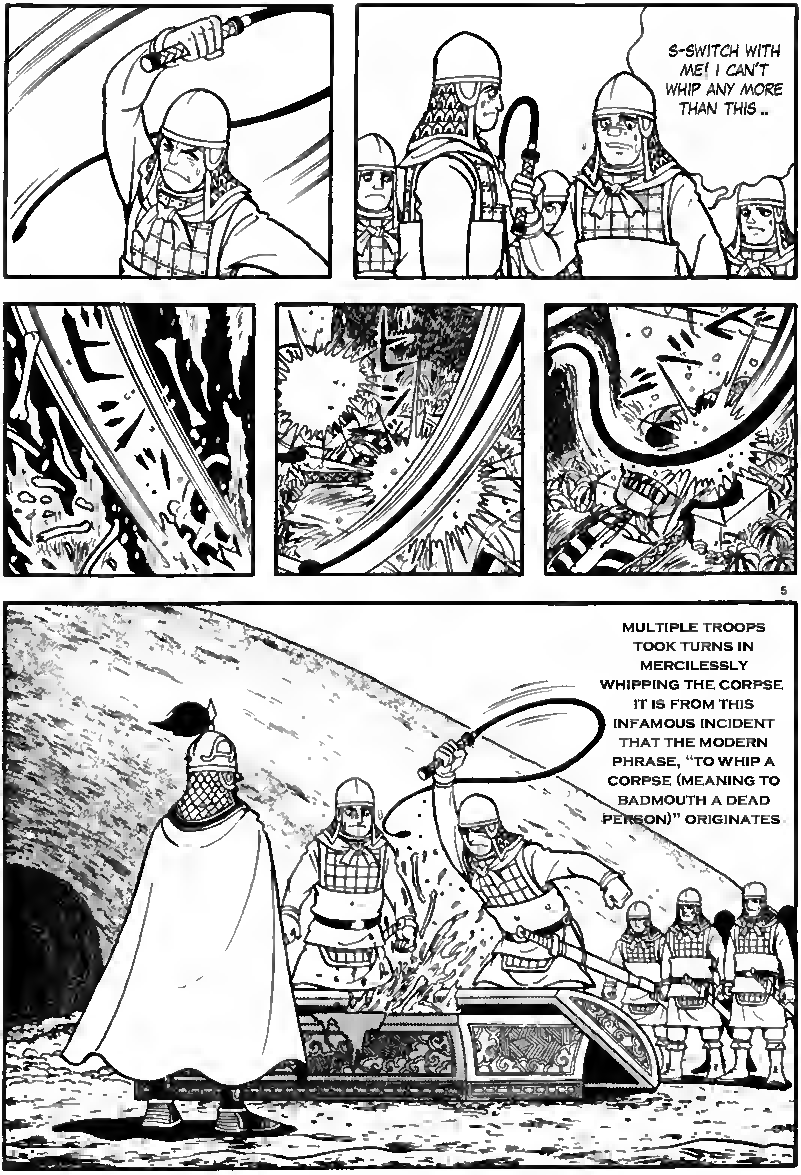
NOW SENTENCE THE CORPSE TO 300 WHIPS!

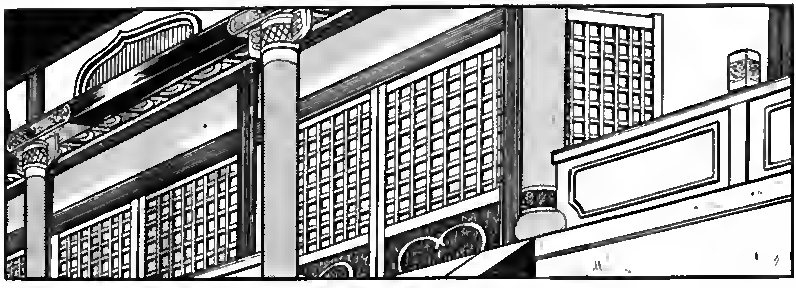
I'LL DO IT,
I'LL DO IT!

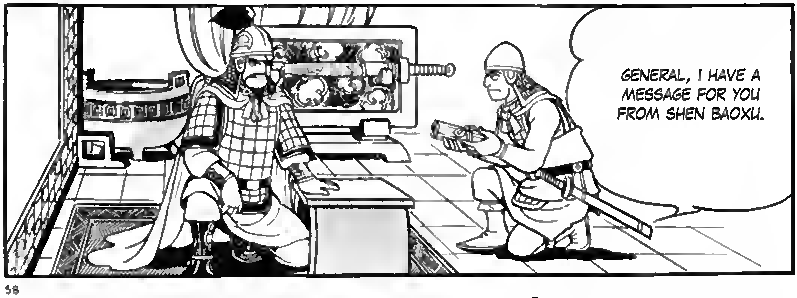


5

WU ZIXU'S FACE WAS FULL OF FURY AS IF POSSESSED BY A DEMON AS HE ORDERED THIS INHUMANE DESECRATION


S-SWITCH WITH ME! I CAN'T WHIP ANY MORE THAN THIS..
MULTIPLE TROOPS TOOK TURNS IN MERCILESSLY WHIPPING THE CORPSE. IT IS FROM THIS INFAMOUS INCIDENT THAT THE MODERN PHRASE, "TO WHIP A CORPSE (MEANING TO BADMOUTH A DEAD PERSON)" ORIGINATES



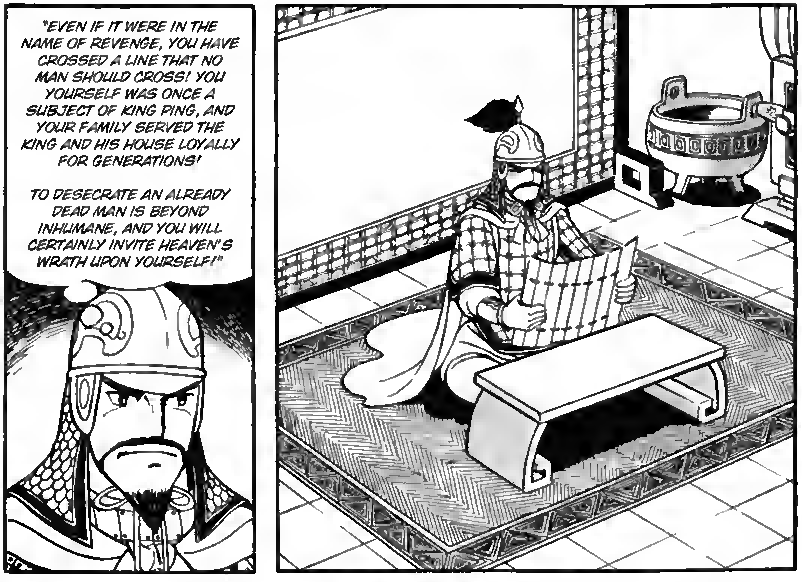

GENERAL, I HAVE A MESSAGE FOR YOU FROM SHEN BAOXU.

58

SHEN BAOXU WAS THE FRIEND THAT WU ZIXU MET ON THE DAY HE FLED FROM CHU MANY YEARS AGO

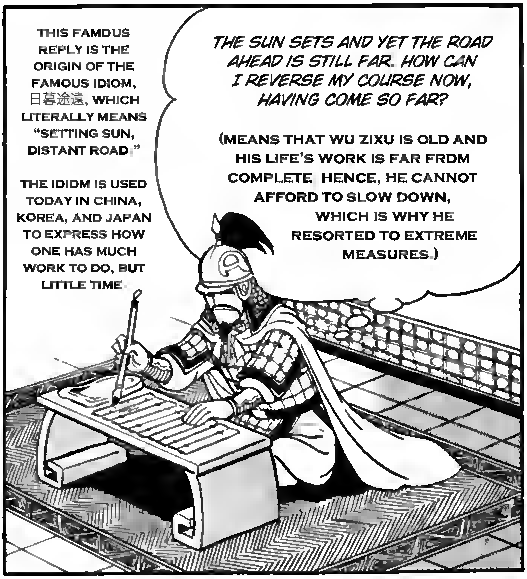
THEN I WILL PROTECT CHU AS ITS LOYAL SUBJECT WHEN THAT TIME COMES.
I WILL FLEE TO HAVE MY REVENGE ON CHU SOME DAY.
THAT IS HOW THE TWO FRIENDS PARTED BACK THEN

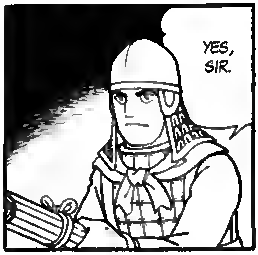
59


"EVEN IF IT WERE IN THE NAME OF REVENGE, YOU HAVE CROSSED A LINE THAT NO MAN SHOULD CROSS! YOU YOURSELF WAS ONCE A SUBJECT OF KING PING, AND YOUR FAMILY SERVED THE KING AND HIS HOUSE LOYALLY FOR GENERATIONS!
TO DESECRATE AN ALREADY DEAD MAN IS BEYOND INHUMANE, AND YOU WILL CERTAINLY INVITE HEAVEN'S WRATH UPON YOURSELF!"

THIS FAMOUS REPLY IS THE ORIGIN OF THE FAMOUS IDIOM, 日暮途遠, WHICH LITERALLY MEANS "SETTING SUN, DISTANT ROAD."

THE IDIOM IS USED TODAY IN CHINA, KOREA, AND JAPAN TO EXPRESS HOW ONE HAS MUCH WORK TO DO, BUT LITTLE TIME.


THE SUN SETS AND YET THE ROAD AHEAD IS STILL FAR. HOW CAN I REVERSE MY COURSE NOW, HAVING COME SO FAR?
(MEANS THAT WU ZIXU IS OLD AND HIS LIFE'S WORK IS FAR FROM COMPLETE. HENCE, HE CANNOT AFFORD TO SLOW DOWN, WHICH IS WHY HE RESORTED TO EXTREME MEASURES.)



*THESE 4-CHARACTER IDIOMS ARE KNOWN AS "CHENGYU" IN CHINESE, "SAJASŎNG-Ŏ" IN KOREAN, AND "YOJIJUKUGO" IN JAPANESE.

WHILE MANY OF THESE IDIOMS ORIGINATE FROM FAMOUS EVENTS IN CHINESE HISTORY, CHINA'S HISTORICALLY DOMINANT INFLUENCE IN EAST ASIA HAS CAUSED THEM TO BE ADOPTED BY KOREAN AND JAPANESE AS WELL.

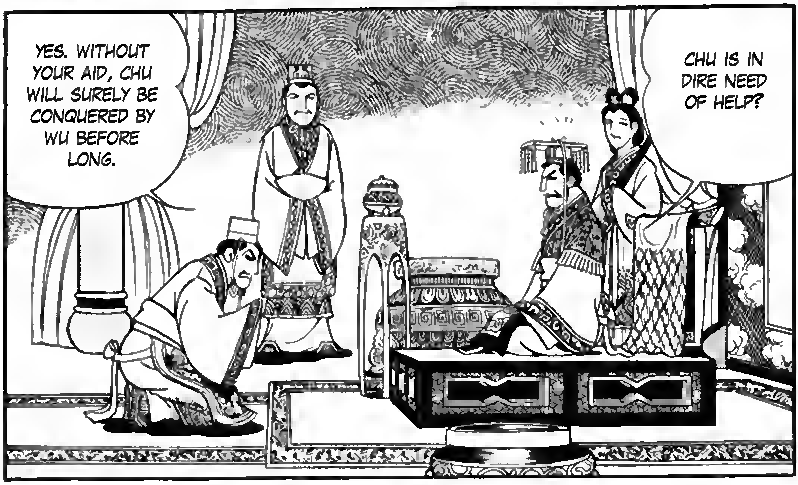
IF I DON'T DO SOMETHING, CHU WILL MEET ITS END FOR CERTAIN...

SO THIS IS HIS RESPONSE

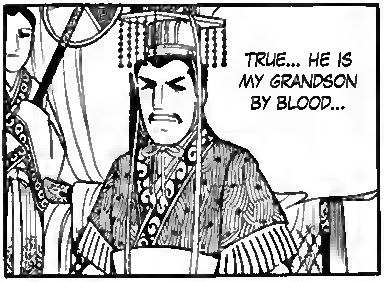
61

AH, THAT'S IT! KING ZHAO'S MOTHER IS A QIN PRINCESS SO I'LL ASK QIN FOR AID!

QIN

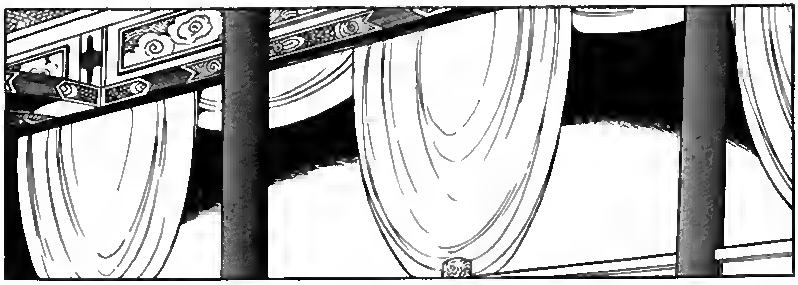

CHU IS IN DIRE NEED OF HELP?
YES. WITHOUT YOUR AID, CHU WILL SURELY BE CONQUERED BY WU BEFORE LONG.

62


TRUE... HE IS MY GRANDSON BY BLOOD...

AS KING ZHAO OF CHU IS BORN FROM A QIN PRINCESS, IS IT NOT YOUR DUTY TO HELP HIM IN TIMES OF NEED, YOUR GRACE?

WHY NOT, SIR...?
BUT I WILL NOT SEND AID.
THINK OF THE CHU'S CURRENT FATE AS DIVINE PUNISHMENT FOR HIS CRIMES.
THE FORMER KING OF CHU'S TYRANNY IS WELL KNOWN. WERE I TO INTERVENE ON CHU'S SIDE TO SAVE HIS LEGACY, I WOULD LOSE STANDING WITH THE OTHER DUKES OF THE ZHOU REALM.
63
SHEN BAOXU WEPT OUTSIDE THE DUKE OF QIN'S PALACE FOR SEVEN DAYS AND SEVEN NIGHTS



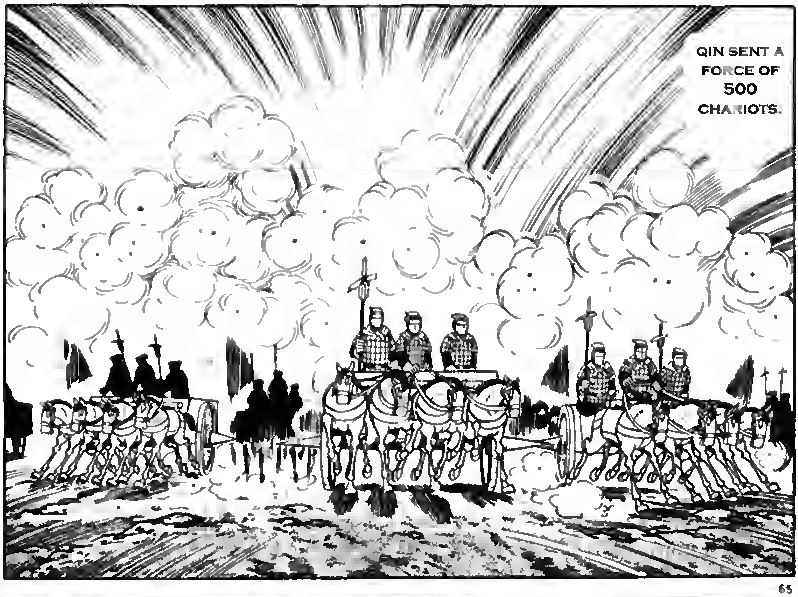
YES, HE REFUSES TO EVEN EAT. HE WILL SURELY DIE FROM STARVATION AT THIS RATE.

IS HE STILL CRYING OUT THERE...?

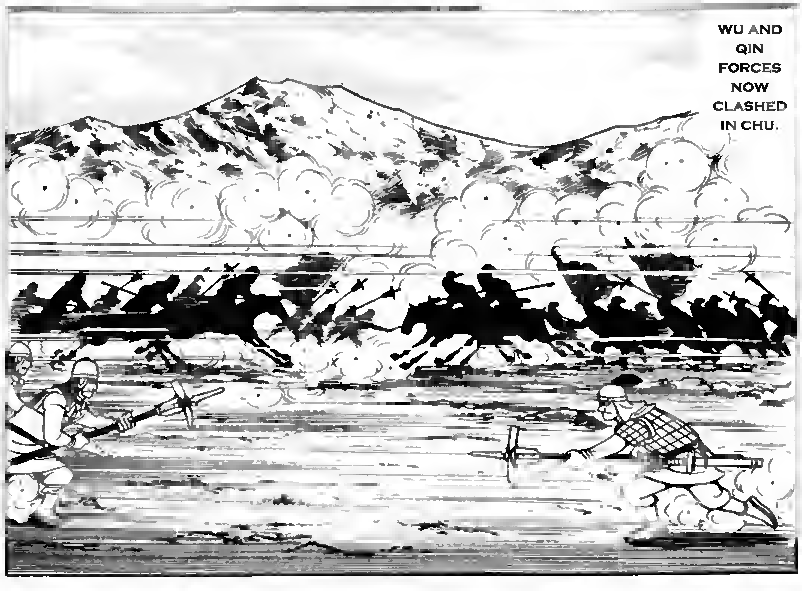
64

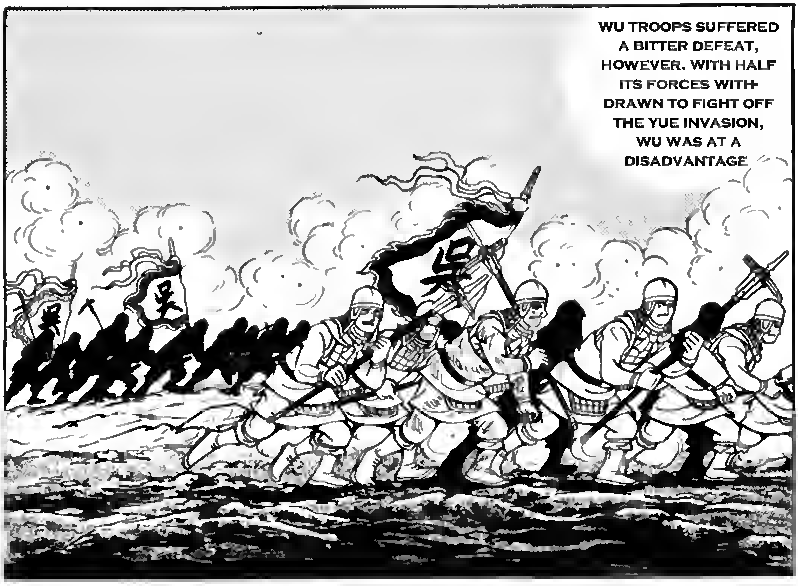
THE FORMER CHU KING MAY HAVE BEEN A TYRANT BUT IT SEEMS THERE ARE STILL LOYAL CHU SUBJECTS WORTH SAVING... I CANNOT LET CHU FALL THEN. THUS, I WILL SEND AID AT ONCE!

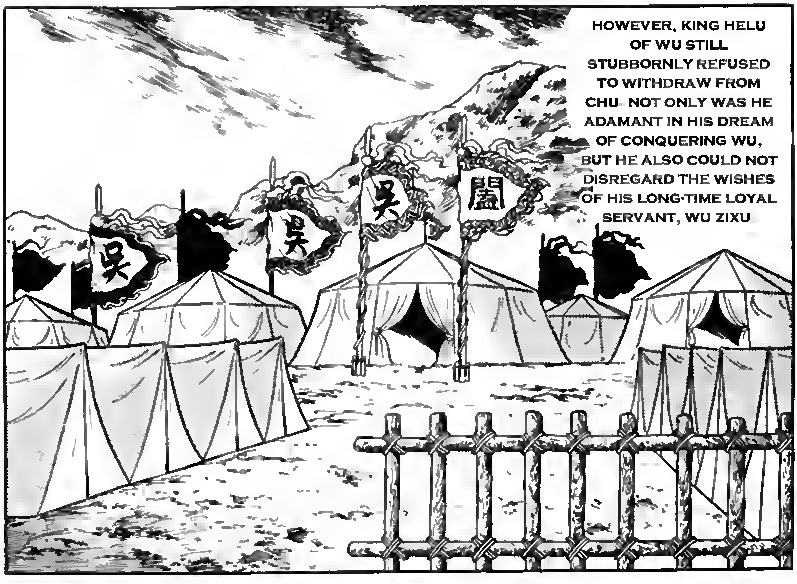
HMM...


QIN SENT A FORCE OF 500 CHARIOTS.

65


WU AND QIN FORCES NOW CLASHED IN CHU.


WU TROOPS SUFFERED A BITTER DEFEAT, HOWEVER. WITH HALF ITS FORCES WITH-DRAWN TO FIGHT OFF THE YUE INVASION, WU WAS AT A DISADVANTAGE
吳
吳
吳


HOWEVER, KING HELU OF WU STILL STUBBORNLY REFUSED TO WITHDRAW FROM CHU. NOT ONLY WAS HE ADAMANT IN HIS DREAM OF CONQUERING WU, BUT HE ALSO COULD NOT DISREGARD THE WISHES OF HIS LONG-TIME LOYAL SERVANT, WU ZIXU
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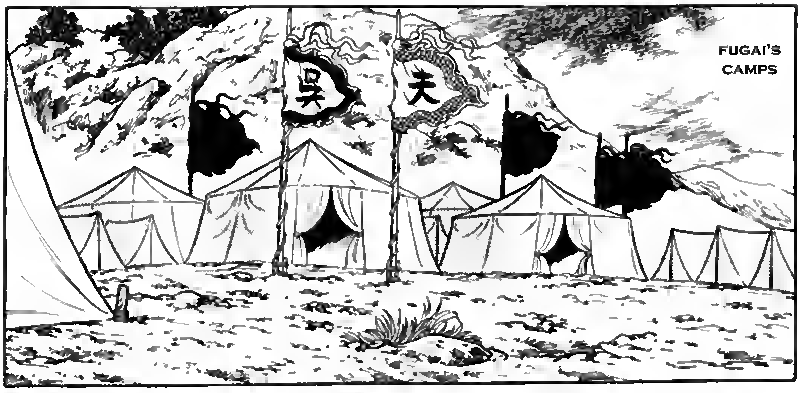
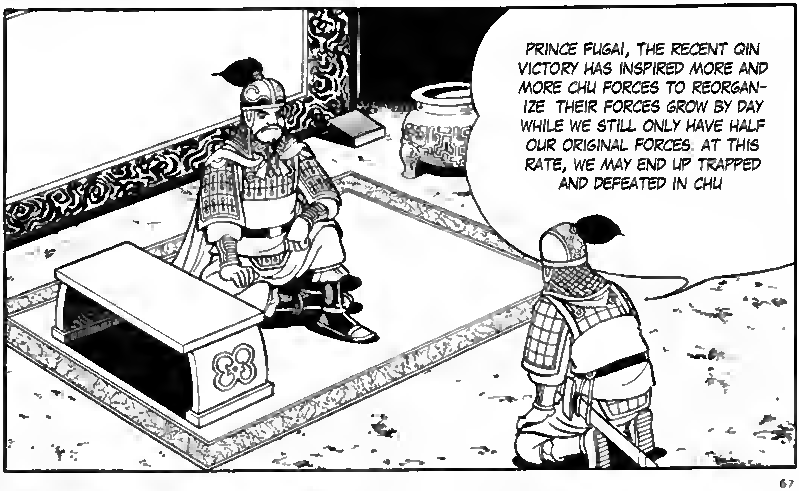
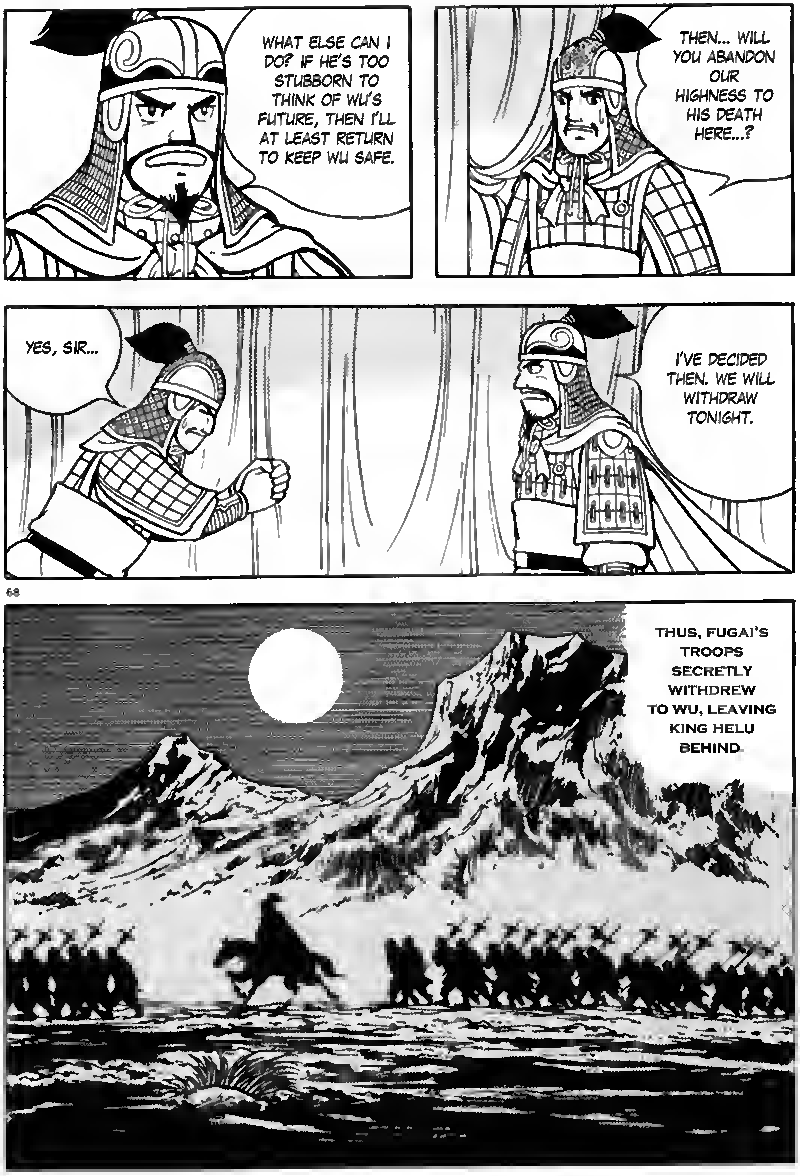

FUGAI'S
CAMPS

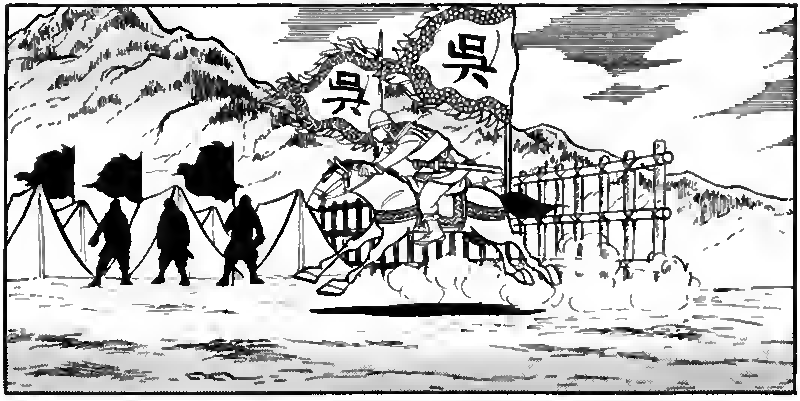

PRINCE FUGAI, THE RECENT QIN VICTORY HAS INSPIRED MORE AND MORE CHU FORCES TO REORGANIZE THEIR FORCES GROW BY DAY WHILE WE STILL ONLY HAVE HALF OUR ORIGINAL FORCES. AT THIS RATE, WE MAY END UP TRAPPED AND DEFEATED IN CHU

67

I'VE BEEN THINKING OF ABANDONING CAMP AND WITHDRAWING TO WU.

MY BROTHER WISHES TO HELP WU ZIXU FULFILL HIS REVENGE AT LAST, BUT I PERSONALLY COULDN'T CARE LESS ABOUT HIM.


WHAT ELSE CAN I DO? IF HE'S TOO STUBBORN TO THINK OF WU'S FUTURE, THEN I'LL AT LEAST RETURN TO KEEP WU SAFE.
THEN... WILL YOU ABANDON OUR HIGHNESS TO HIS DEATH HERE...?
YES, SIR...
I'VE DECIDED THEN. WE WILL WITHDRAW TONIGHT.
68
THUS, FUGAI'S TROOPS SECRETLY WITHDREW TO WU, LEAVING KING HELU BEHIND.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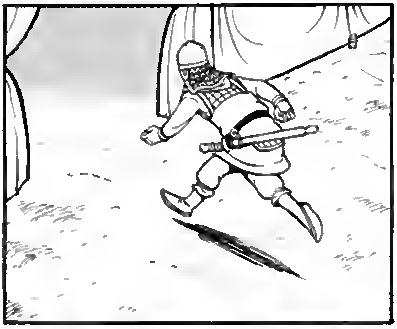
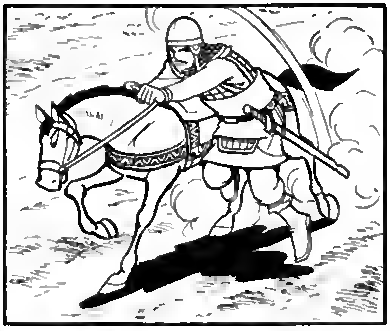
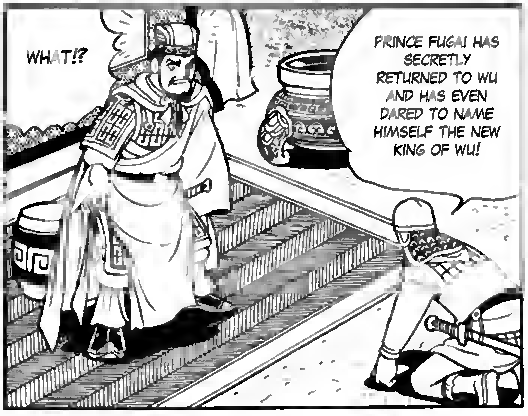
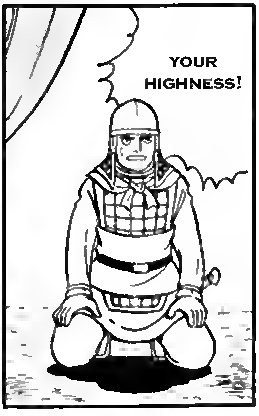
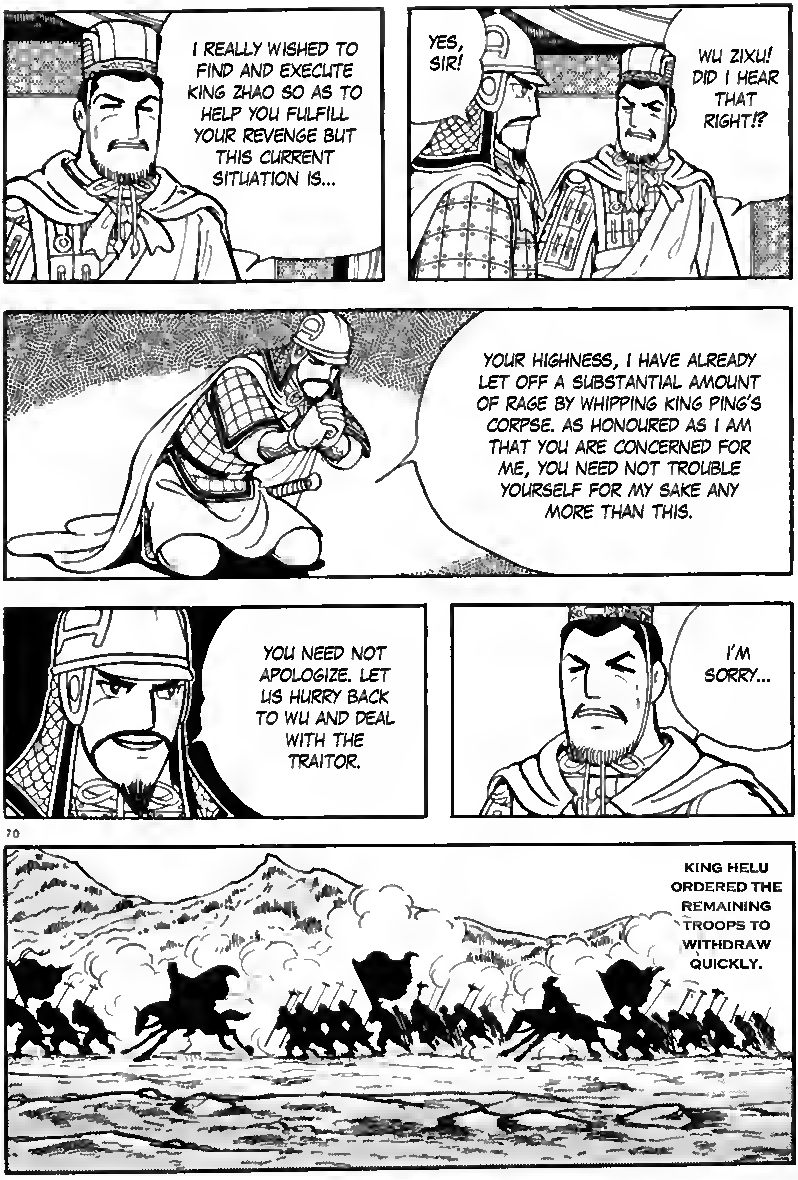




69


WHAT!?
PRINCE FUGAI HAS SECRETLY RETURNED TO WU AND HAS EVEN DARED TO NAME HIMSELF THE NEW KING OF WU!

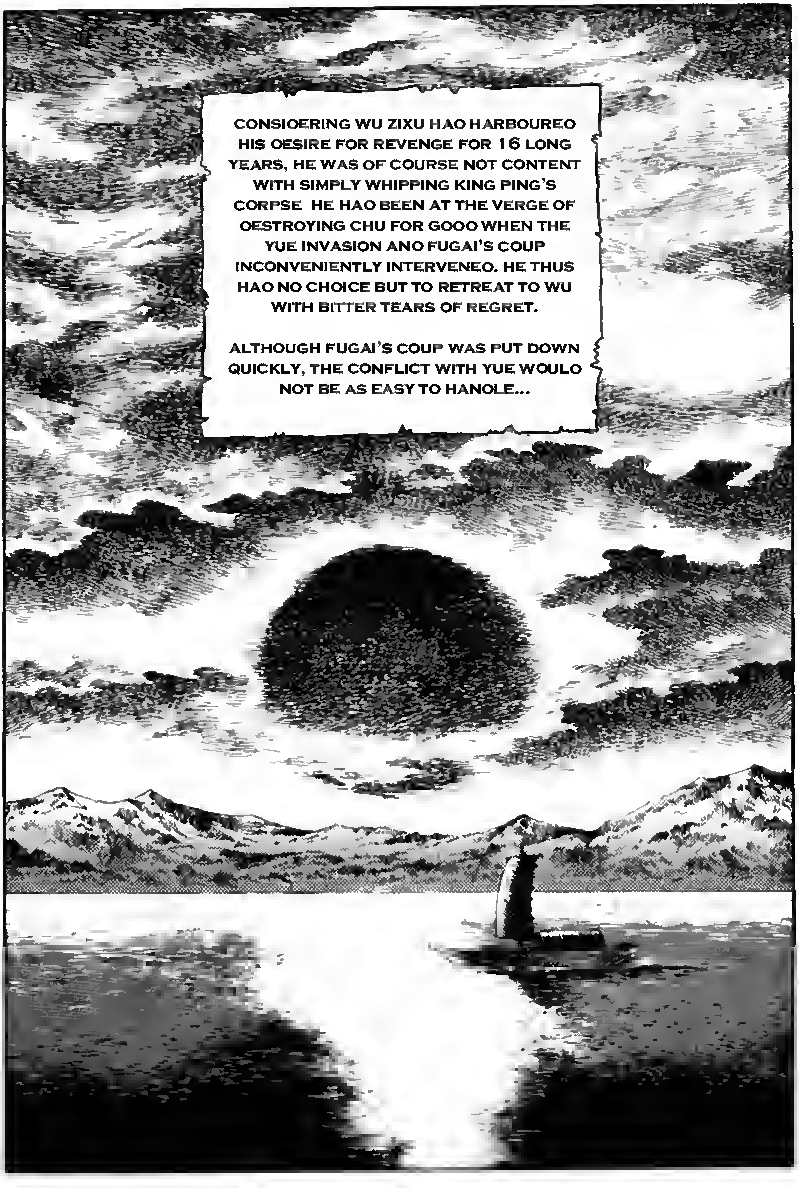

YOUR HIGHNESS!


I REALLY WISHED TO FIND AND EXECUTE KING ZHAO SO AS TO HELP YOU FULFILL YOUR REVENGE BUT THIS CURRENT SITUATION IS...
YES, SIR!
WU ZIXU! DID I HEAR THAT RIGHT!?
YOUR HIGHNESS, I HAVE ALREADY LET OFF A SUBSTANTIAL AMOUNT OF RAGE BY WHIPPING KING PING'S CORPSE. AS HONOURED AS I AM THAT YOU ARE CONCERNED FOR ME, YOU NEED NOT TROUBLE YOURSELF FOR MY SAKE ANY MORE THAN THIS.
YOU NEED NOT APOLOGIZE. LET US HURRY BACK TO WU AND DEAL WITH THE TRAITOR.
I'M SORRY...
KING HELU ORDERED THE REMAINING TROOPS TO WITHDRAW QUICKLY.

UPON HIS RETURN, HE SMASHED FUGAI'S TROOPS,

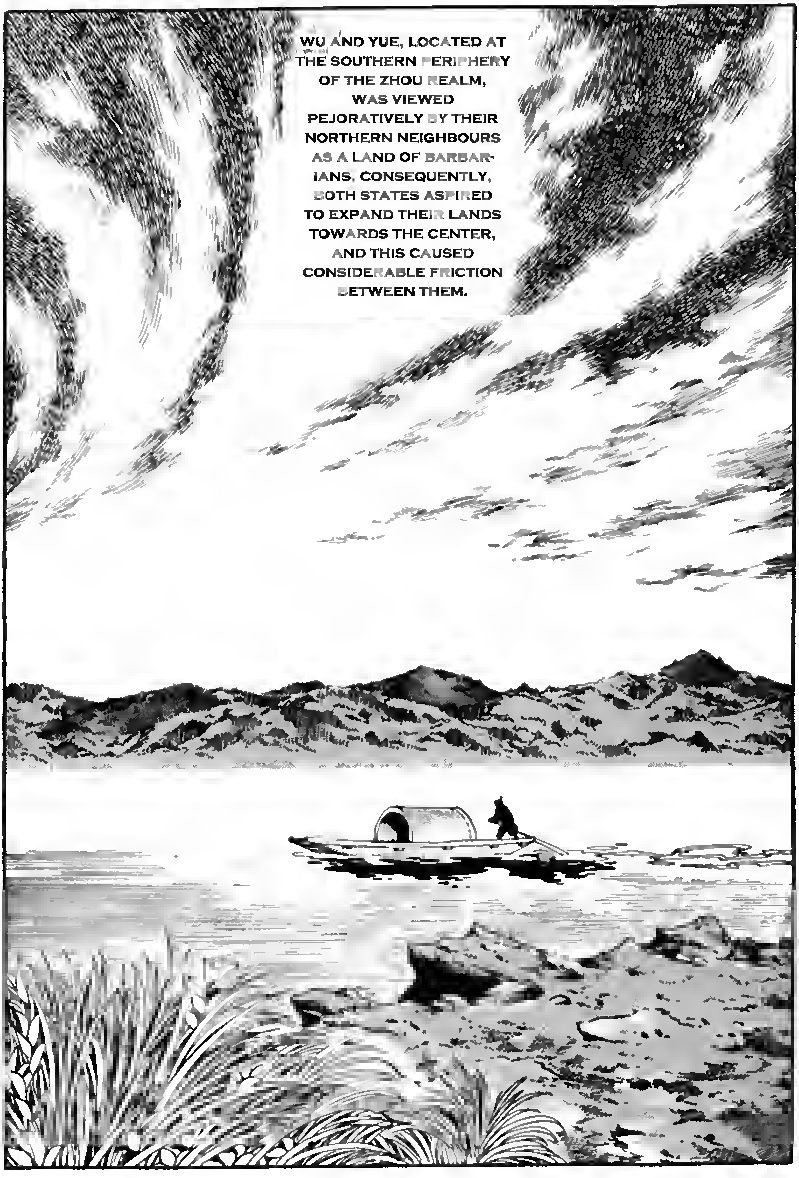
71

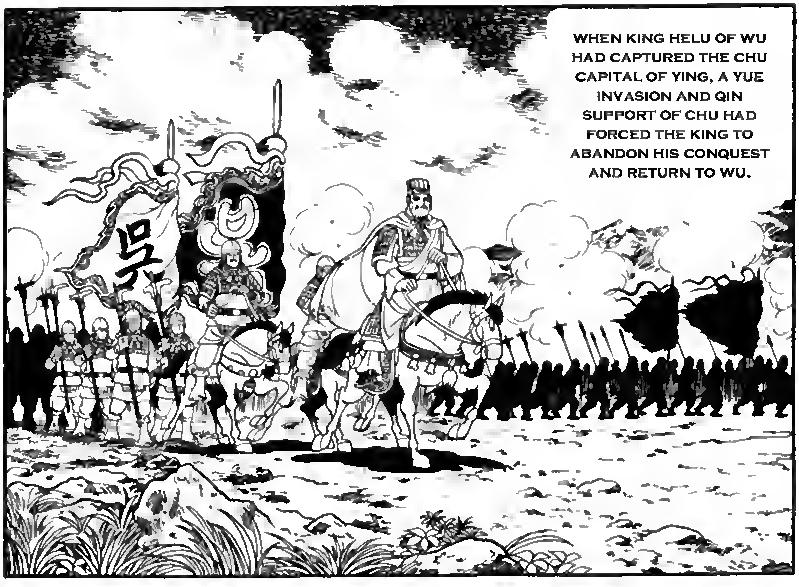
FORCING FUGAI TO FLEE TO CHU.


CONSIDERING WU ZIXU HAD HARBOURED HIS DESIRE FOR REVENGE FOR 16 LONG YEARS, HE WAS OF COURSE NOT CONTENT WITH SIMPLY WHIPPING KING PING'S CORPSE. HE HAD BEEN AT THE VERGE OF DESTROYING CHU FOR GOOD WHEN THE YUE INVASION AND FUGAI'S COUP INCONVENIENTLY INTERVENED. HE THUS HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO RETREAT TO WU WITH BITTER TEARS OF REGRET.
ALTHOUGH FUGAI'S COUP WAS PUT DOWN QUICKLY, THE CONFLICT WITH YUE WOULD NOT BE AS EASY TO HANDLE...

Chapter 3

Tasting Gallbladder


WU AND YUE, LOCATED AT THE SOUTHERN PERIPHERY OF THE ZHOU REALM, WAS VIEWED PEJORATIVELY BY THEIR NORTHERN NEIGHBOURS AS A LAND OF BARBARIANS. CONSEQUENTLY, BOTH STATES ASPIRED TO EXPAND THEIR LANDS TOWARDS THE CENTER, AND THIS CAUSED CONSIDERABLE FRICTION BETWEEN THEM.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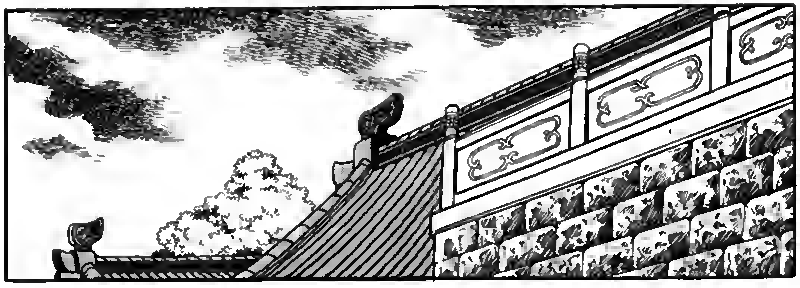
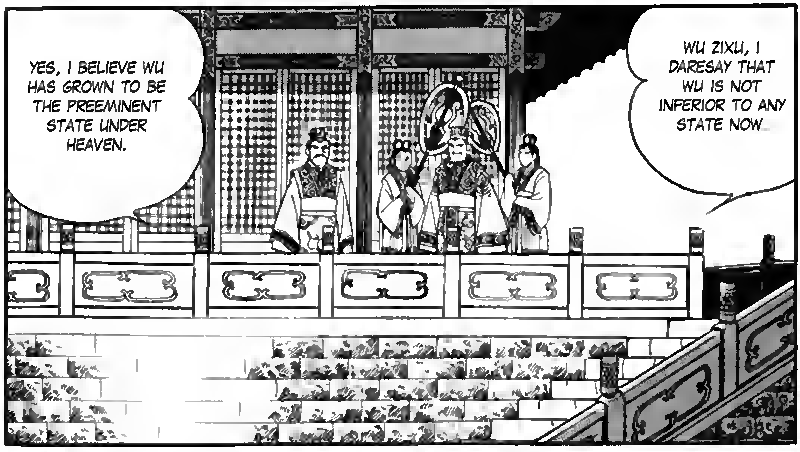
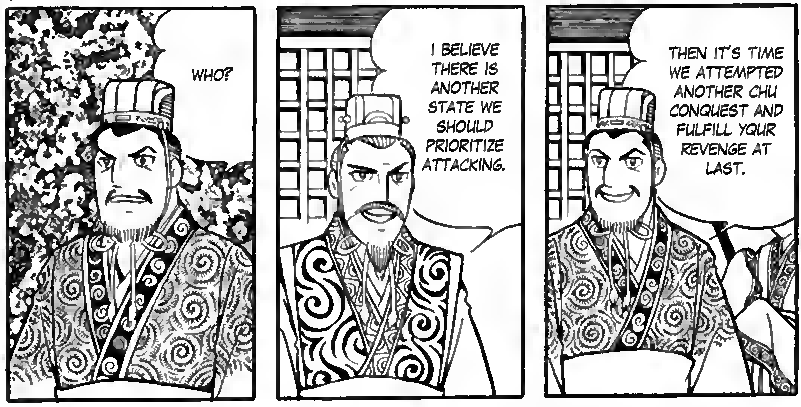
WHEN KING HELU OF WU HAD CAPTURED THE CHU CAPITAL OF YING, A YUE INVASION AND QIN SUPPORT OF CHU HAD FORCED THE KING TO ABANDON HIS CONQUEST AND RETURN TO WU.

3

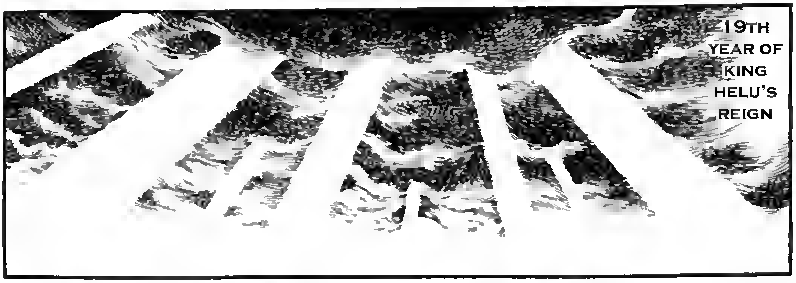
FOR 8 YEARS AFTERWARDS, KING HELU, WITH THE HELP OF WU ZIXU, BIDED HIS TIME BUILDING UP WU'S STRENGTH FOR ANOTHER CHANCE TO EXPAND WU'S LANDS.

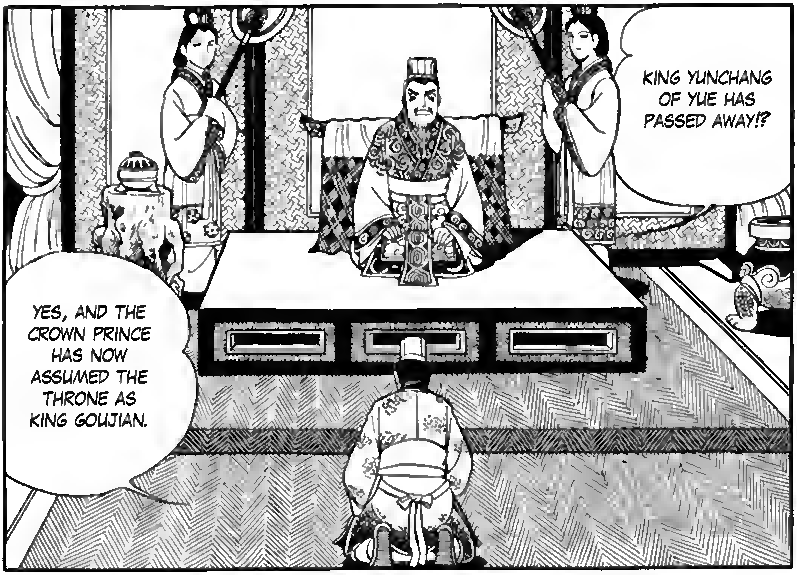



YES, I BELIEVE WU HAS GROWN TO BE THE PREEMINENT STATE UNDER HEAVEN.
WU ZIXU, I DARESAY THAT WU IS NOT INFERIOR TO ANY STATE NOW.

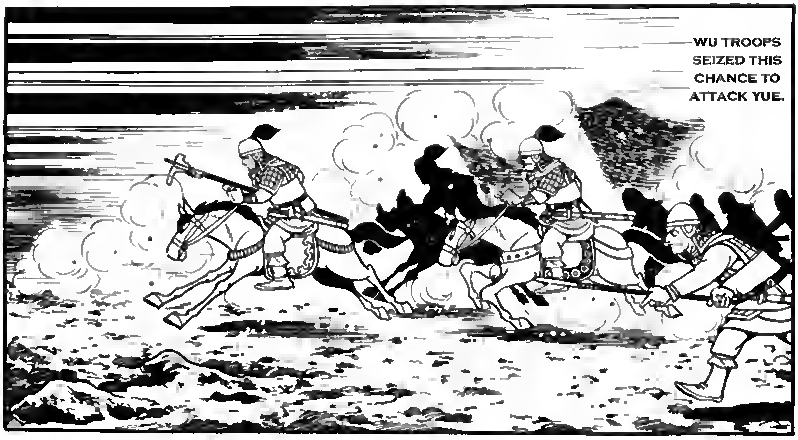

WHO?
I BELIEVE THERE IS ANOTHER STATE WE SHOULD PRIORITIZE ATTACKING.
THEN IT'S TIME WE ATTEMPTED ANOTHER CHU CONQUEST AND FULFILL YOUR REVENGE AT LAST.

YUE IS A SMALL STATE. IT IS WORTH LITTLE SIGNIFICANCE.
YUE...?
YUE.
I SEE...
IT WILL SURELY ATTACK US WHENEVER WE MARCH OUR ARMIES TO CHU OR TO THE NORTH, LIKE IT DID LAST TIME. FOR WU, THE YUE THREAT IS LIKE A DISEASE OF THE HEART. IT MUST BE ROOTED OUT AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.
NO, YUE HAS EXERTED MUCH ENERGY IN RECENT YEARS TO KEEP UP WITH US. AS IT HARBOURS DREAMS OF EXPANDING TO THE ZHOU CENTER, IT VIEWS WU AS ITS PRIMARY OBSTACLE.
5
EXCELLENT CHOICE IT WILL SURELY GIVE WU A FIRMER FOUNDATION FOR ITS FUTURE AMBITIONS
VERY WELL, I SHALL CONQUER YUE BEFORE EXPANDING NORTH AS YOU RECOMMEND.


19TH YEAR OF KING HELU'S REIGN


KING YUNCHANG OF YUE HAS PASSED AWAY!?
YES, AND THE CROWN PRINCE HAS NOW ASSUMED THE THRONE AS KING GOUJIAN.

YES, YOUR HIGHNESS.
WELL, THIS IS A GOOD OPPORTUNITY MOBILIZE THE ARMY SO WE CAN STRIKE WHILE YUE IS STILL BUSY MOURNING THEIR FORMER KING!


WU TROOPS SEIZED THIS CHANCE TO ATTACK YUE.

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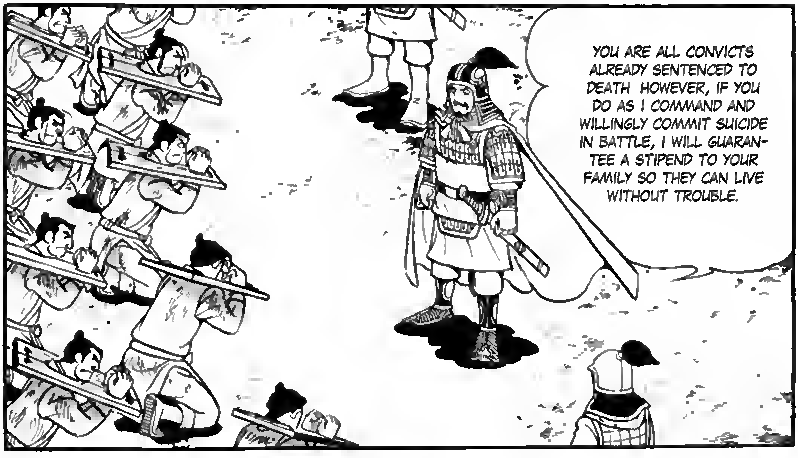
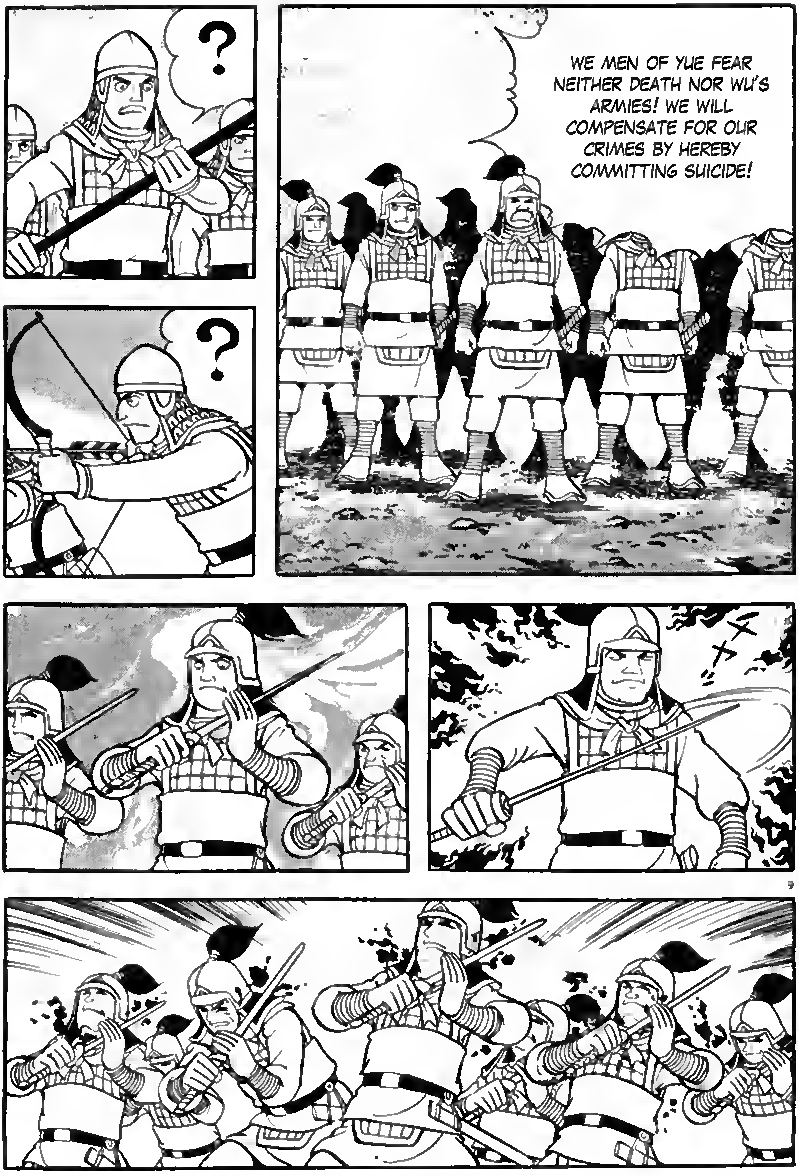
AGAINST THIS INVASION, THE YUE LEADER FAN LI CAME UP WITH AN UNORTHODOX TACTIC


YOU ARE ALL CONVICTS ALREADY SENTENCED TO DEATH. HOWEVER, IF YOU DO AS I COMMAND AND WILLINGLY COMMIT SUICIDE IN BATTLE, I WILL GUARANTEE A STIPEND TO YOUR FAMILY SO THEY CAN LIVE WITHOUT TROUBLE.

THAT'S RIGHT, ONLY IF YOU FOLLOW MY ORDERS
MY DEAR OLD MOTHER WILL BE TAKEN CARE OF ?
YOU'LL TAKE CARE OF MY WIFE AND KIDS!?
WE'LL GLADLY COMMIT SUICIDE AS YOU COMMAND!
PLEASE LET US FIGHT UNDER YOU, SIR!
ENEMIES!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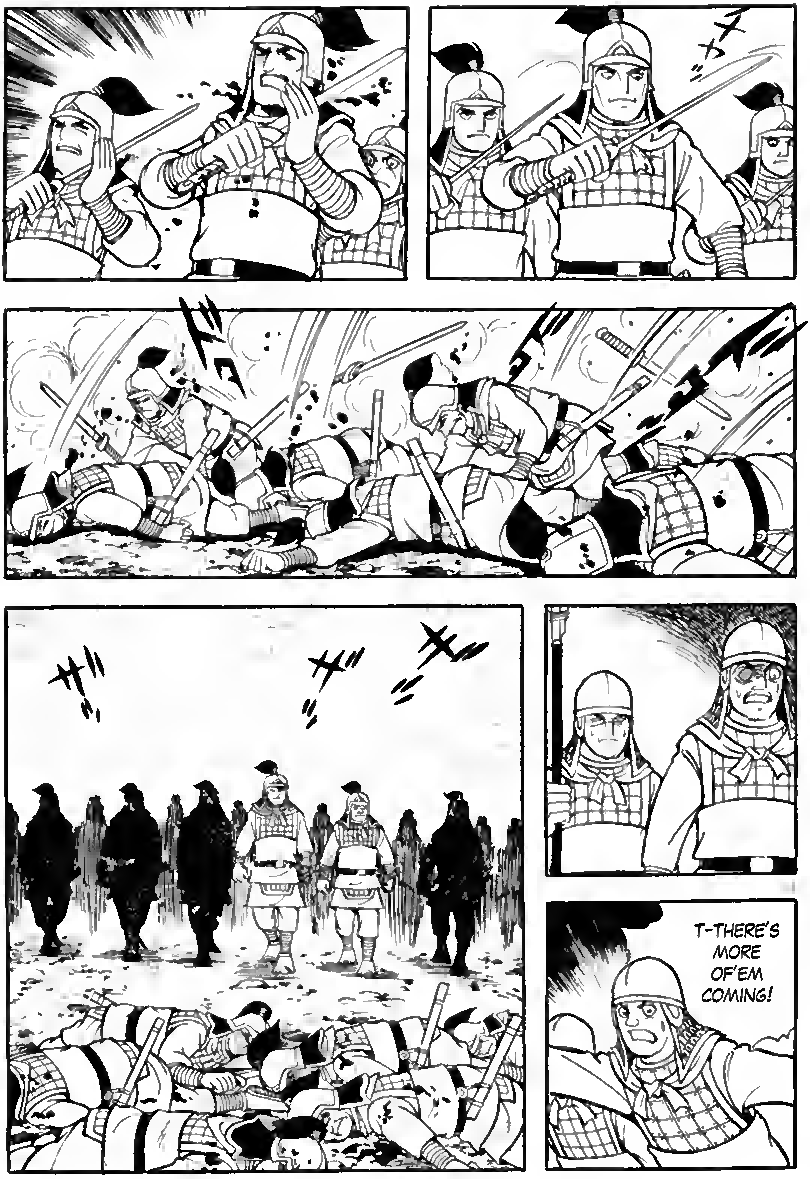
?
WE MEN OF YUE FEAR NEITHER DEATH NOR WU'S ARMIES! WE WILL COMPENSATE FOR OUR CRIMES BY HEREBY COMMITTING SUICIDE!

WHA...
AHH!
FOR DISOBEYING THE LAWS OF YUE, WE WILL COMMIT SUICIDE WITHOUT HESITATION!

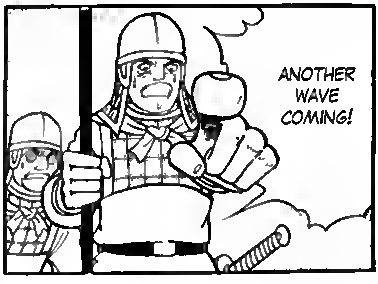

T-THERE'S MORE OF'EM COMING!

AS LAWBREAKERS, WE WILL COMMIT SUICIDE WITHOUT FEAR NOR HESITATION!

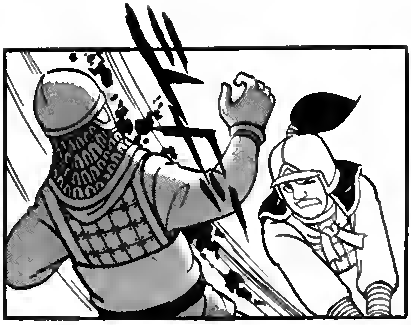
ALL THE WU SOLDIERS STOOD DUMB-FOUNDED, FORGETTING EVEN THE FACT THAT THEY WERE IN BATTLE.

12

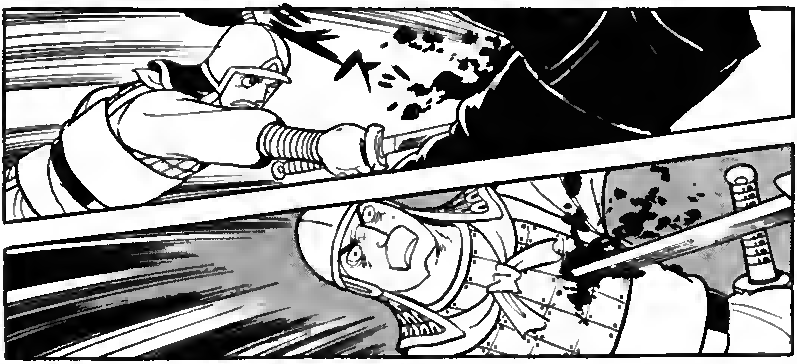
I THOUGHT OUR LAWS WERE HARSH, BUT THOSE OF YUE MUST BE SOMETHIN' ELSE..


ANOTHER WAVE COMING!

WU ZIXU'S REALIZATION WAS TOO LATE BY THIS TIME.
SOMETHING'S OFF...
FOR VIOLATING THE LAWS OF YUE, WE WILL CHARGE WILLINGLY TO DEATH!
13



WHA!?



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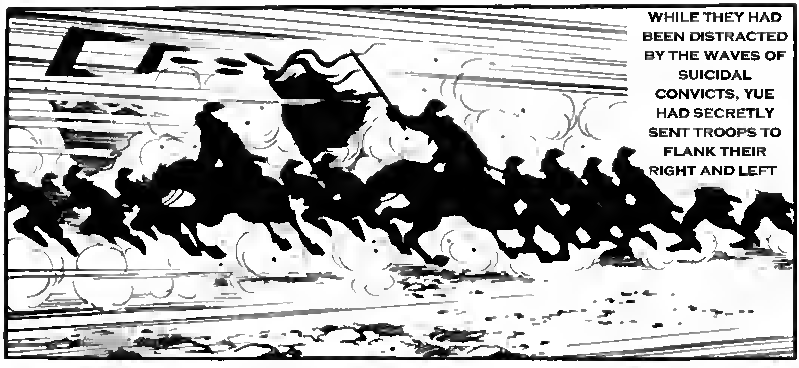
THE WU TROOPS WERE CAUGHT COMPLETELY OFF-GUARD BY THE SUDDEN ATTACK.


WHILE THEY HAD BEEN DISTRACTED BY THE WAVES OF SUICIDAL CONVICTS, YUE HAD SECRETLY SENT TROOPS TO FLANK THEIR RIGHT AND LEFT

ONCE IN PLACE, THEY MOUNTED A CONCERTED ATTACK
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R-RIGHT!
YOUR HIGHNESS, WE MUST RETREAT FOR NOW!
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RETREAT! RETREAT!
AGHH!
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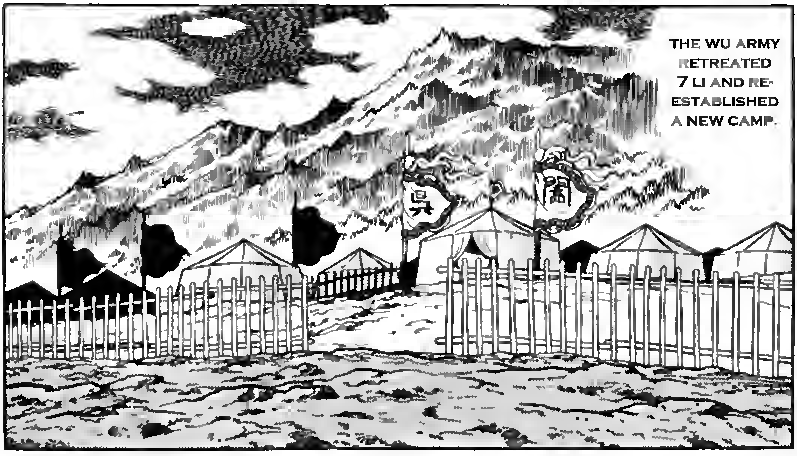
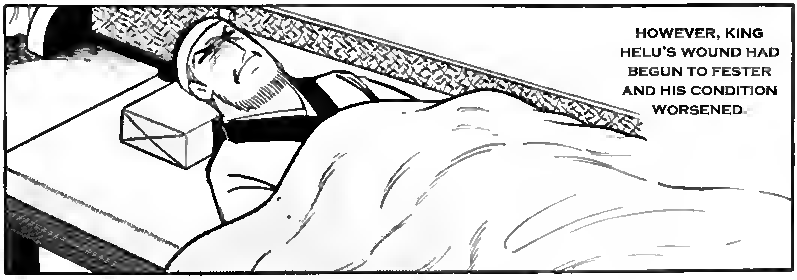
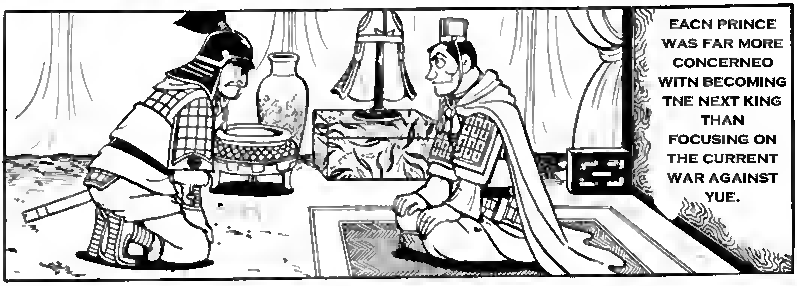
RETREAT!
WORRY NOT! IT'S A MERE SCRATCH...
YOUR HIGHNESS!

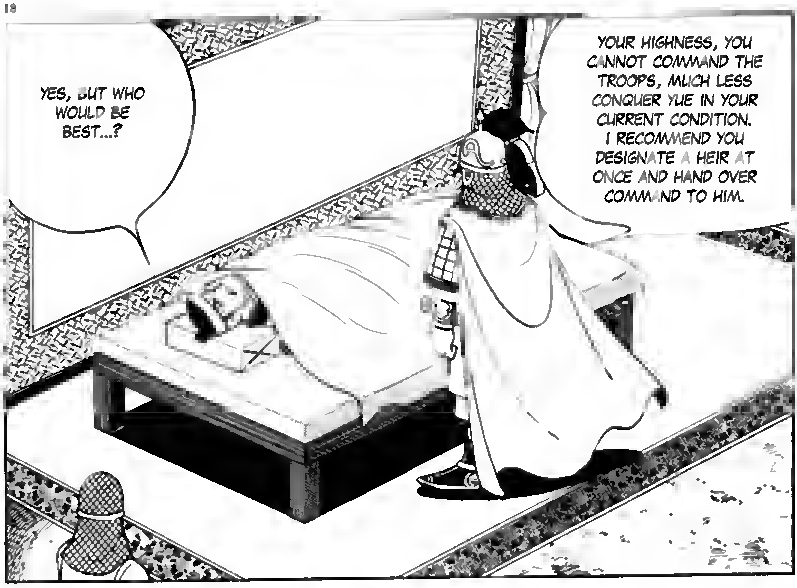

THE WU ARMY RETREATED 7 LI AND RE-ESTABLISHED A NEW CAMP.

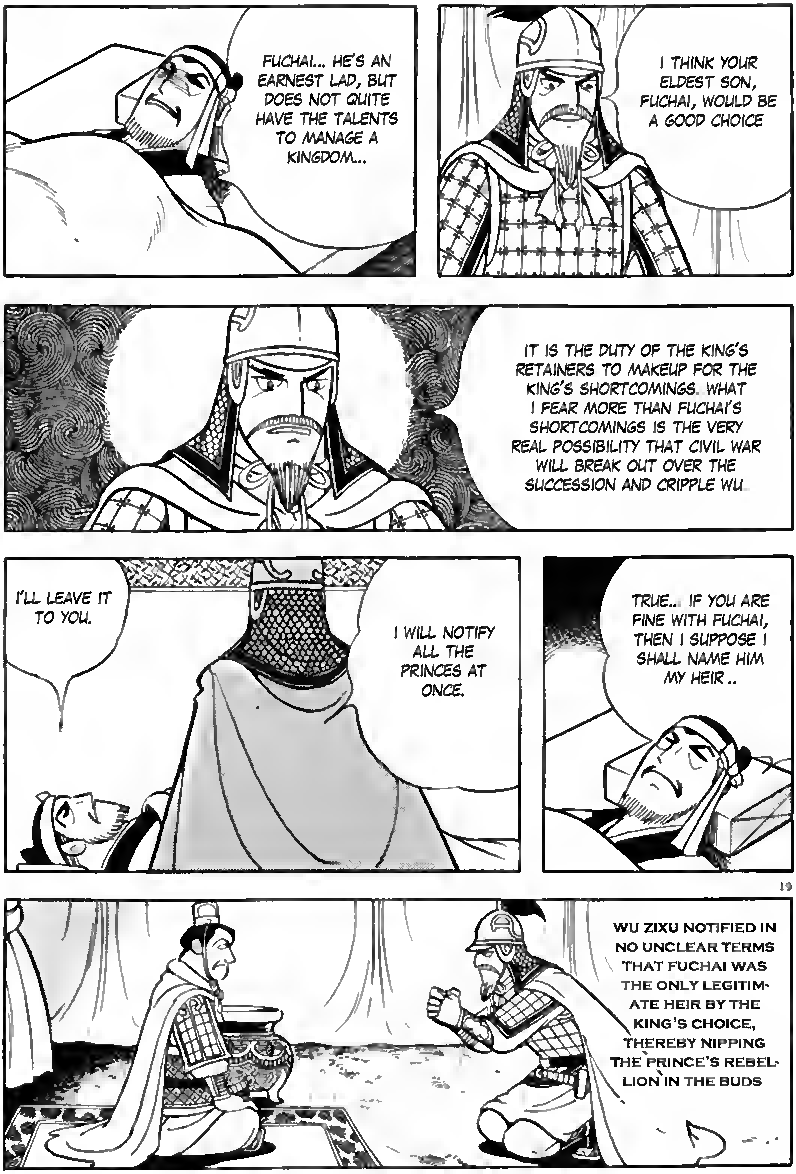
17


HOWEVER, KING HELU'S WOUND HAD BEGUN TO FESTER AND HIS CONDITION WORSENED.

THE KING'S WORSENING CONDITION SOON MADE RELATIONS AMONG THE WU PRINCES COLD AND EVEN HOSTILE.


EACH PRINCE WAS FAR MORE CONCERNED WITH BECOMING THE NEXT KING THAN FOCUSING ON THE CURRENT WAR AGAINST YUE.


YOUR HIGHNESS, YOU CANNOT COMMAND THE TROOPS, MUCH LESS CONQUER YUE IN YOUR CURRENT CONDITION. I RECOMMEND YOU DESIGNATE A HEIR AT ONCE AND HAND OVER COMMAND TO HIM.
YES, BUT WHO WOULD BE BEST...?


FUCHAI... HE'S AN EARNEST LAD, BUT DOES NOT QUITE HAVE THE TALENTS TO MANAGE A KINGDOM...
I THINK YOUR ELDEST SON, FUCHAI, WOULD BE A GOOD CHOICE
IT IS THE DUTY OF THE KING'S RETAINERS TO MAKEUP FOR THE KING'S SHORTCOMINGS. WHAT I FEAR MORE THAN FUCHAI'S SHORTCOMINGS IS THE VERY REAL POSSIBILITY THAT CIVIL WAR WILL BREAK OUT OVER THE SUCCESSION AND CRIPPLE WU.
I'LL LEAVE IT TO YOU.
I WILL NOTIFY ALL THE PRINCES AT ONCE.
TRUE... IF YOU ARE FINE WITH FUCHAI, THEN I SUPPOSE I SHALL NAME HIM MY HEIR..
WU ZIXU NOTIFIED IN NO UNCLEAR TERMS THAT FUCHAI WAS THE ONLY LEGITIMATE HEIR BY THE KING'S CHOICE, THEREBY NIPPING THE PRINCE'S REBELLION IN THE BUDS

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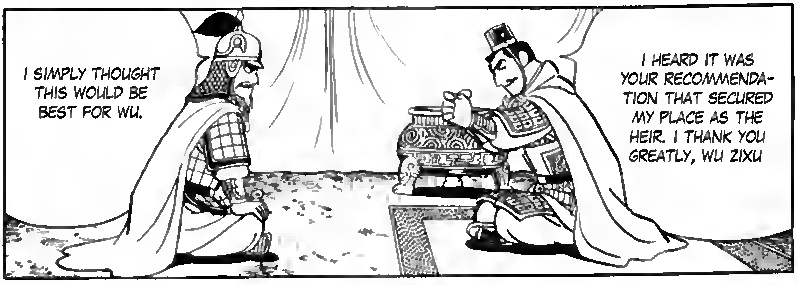
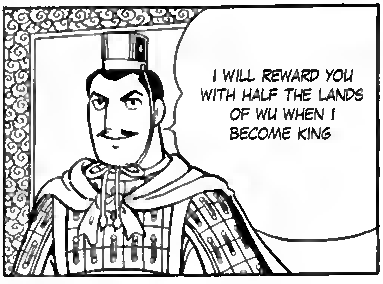
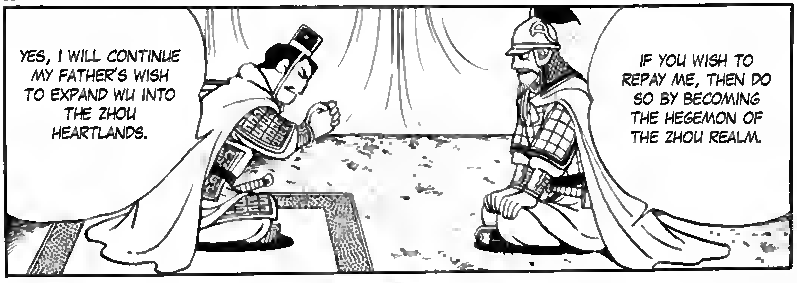
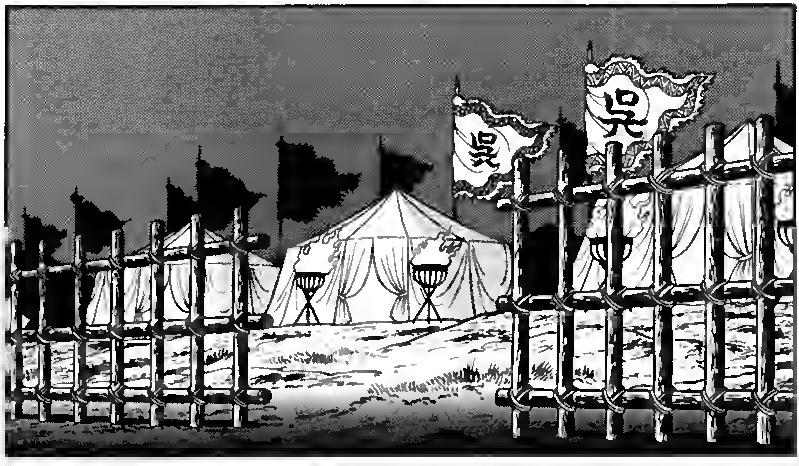

I SIMPLY THOUGHT THIS WOULD BE BEST FOR WU.
I HEARD IT WAS YOUR RECOMMENDATION THAT SECURED MY PLACE AS THE HEIR. I THANK YOU GREATLY, WU ZIXU

THAT IS NOT NECESSARY, SIR. I DID NOT RECOMMEND YOU ON SUCH ULTERIOR MOTIVES. I SIMPLY WISH TO SEE WU REMAIN A POWERFUL KINGDOM.


I WILL REWARD YOU WITH HALF THE LANDS OF WU WHEN I BECOME KING


YES, I WILL CONTINUE MY FATHER'S WISH TO EXPAND WU INTO THE ZHOU HEARTLANDS.
IF YOU WISH TO REPAY ME, THEN DO SO BY BECOMING THE HEGEMON OF THE ZHOU REALM.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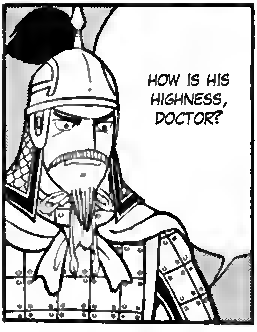
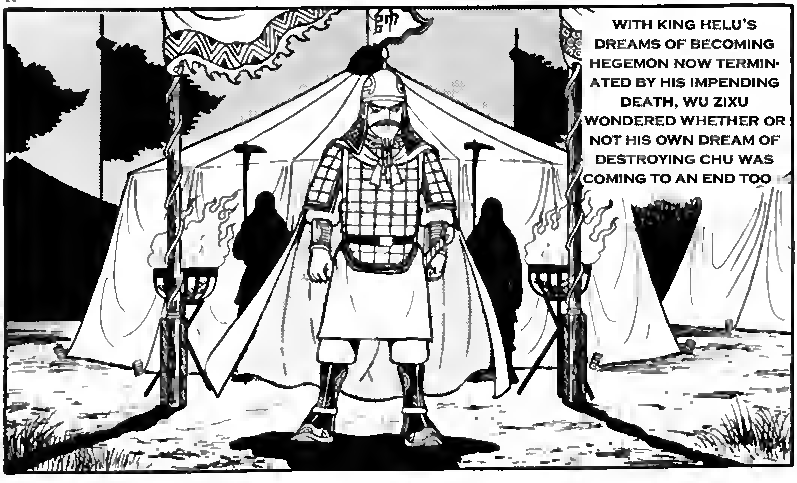

HOW IS HIS HIGHNESS, DOCTOR?

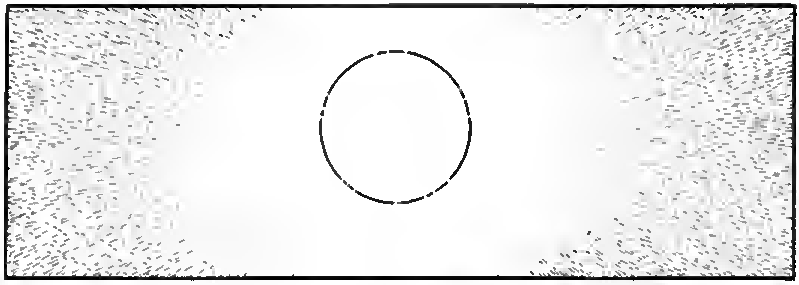
THE FESTERING AREA IS SPREADING LARGER AND LARGER.

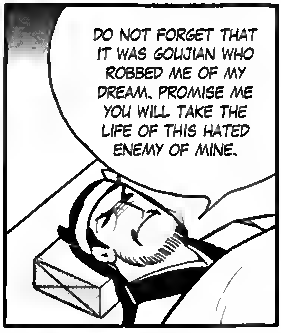
HE LIKELY HAS BUT A FEW DAYS LEFT..

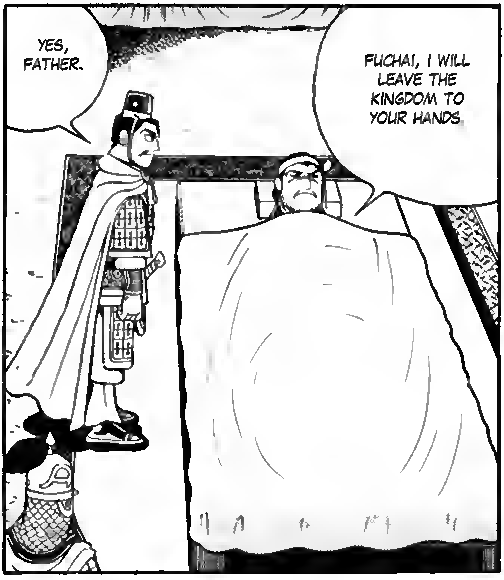
YOU CANNOT CURE HIM...!?
I REGRET TO SAY THERE IS NOTHING I CAN DO AT THIS POINT.

YES, SIR.
ONLY A FEW DAYS!?


WITH KING HELU'S DREAMS OF BECOMING HEGEMON NOW TERMINATED BY HIS IMPENDING DEATH, WU ZIXU WONDERED WHETHER OR NOT HIS OWN DREAM OF DESTROYING CHU WAS COMING TO AN END TOO




DO NOT FORGET THAT IT WAS GOUJIAN WHO ROBBED ME OF MY DREAM. PROMISE ME YOU WILL TAKE THE LIFE OF THIS HATED ENEMY OF MINE.


YES, FATHER.
FUCHAI, I WILL LEAVE THE KINGDOM TO YOUR HANDS.

YES, I'M SURE I CAN DO SO WITHIN 3 YEARS.

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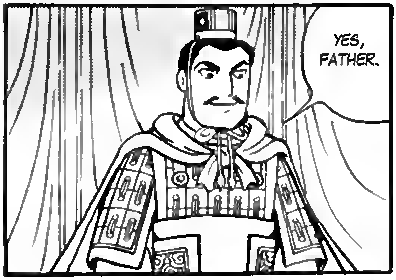
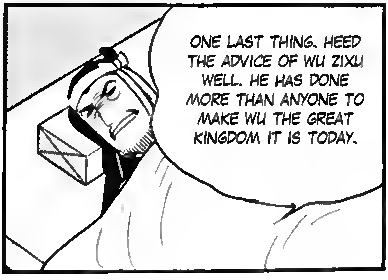
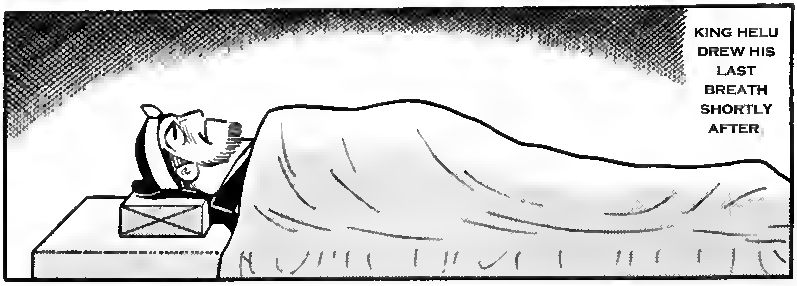

YES, FATHER.


ONE LAST THING. HEED THE ADVICE OF WU ZIXU WELL. HE HAS DONE MORE THAN ANYONE TO MAKE WU THE GREAT KINGDOM IT IS TODAY.


KING HELU DREW HIS LAST BREATH SHORTLY AFTER

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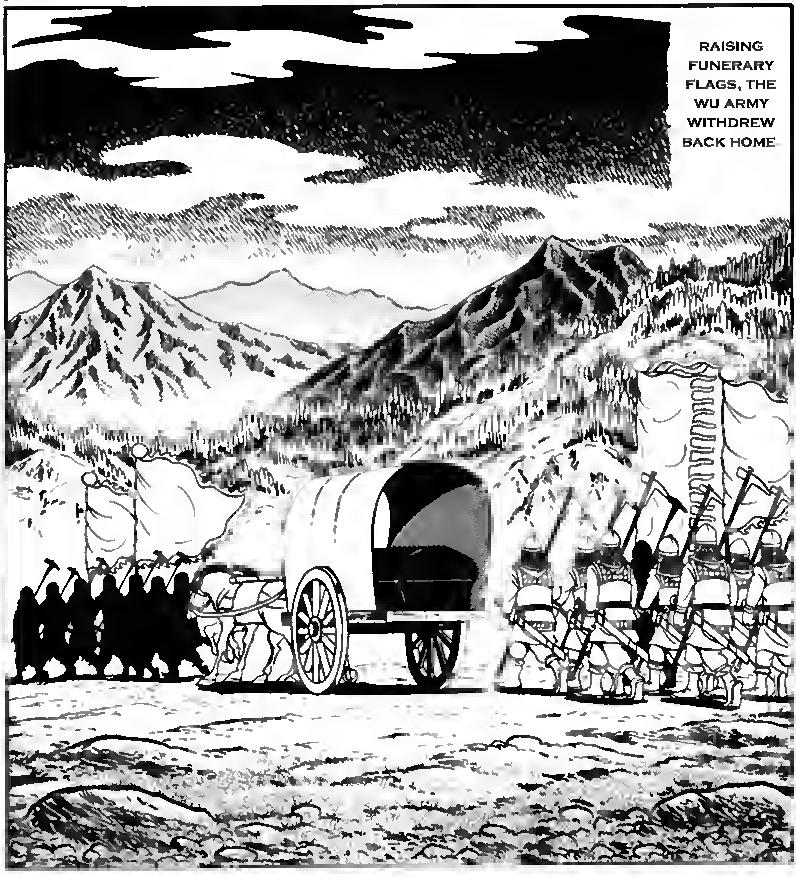
RAISING FUNERARY FLAGS, THE WU ARMY WITHDREW BACK HOME

UPON RETURNING, FUCHAI WAS ENTHRONED AS THE NEW KING.
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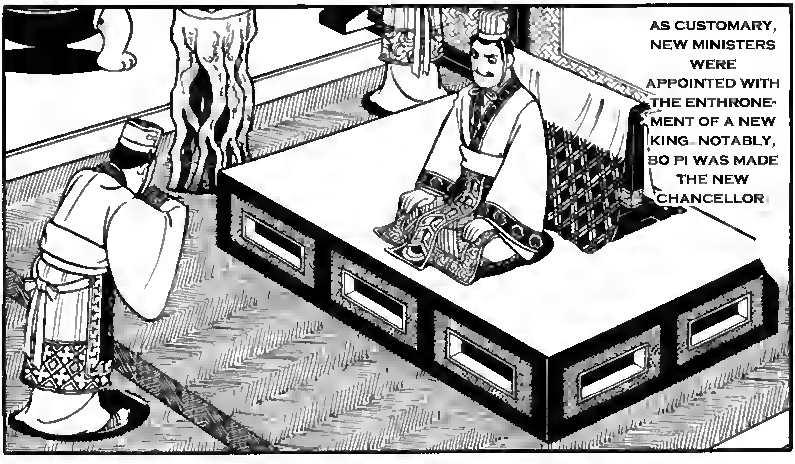
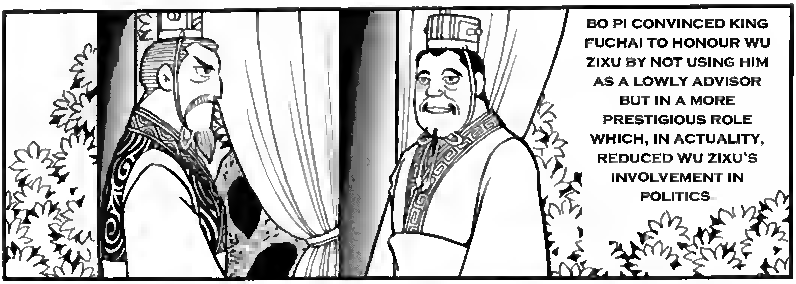
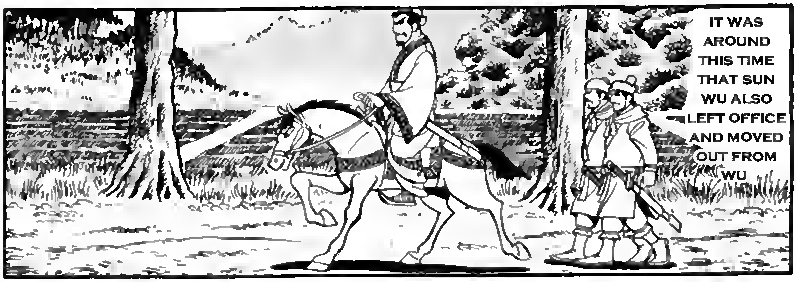

AS CUSTOMARY, NEW MINISTERS WERE APPOINTED WITH THE ENTHRONEMENT OF A NEW KING. NOTABLY, BO PI WAS MADE THE NEW CHANCELLOR.


BO PI CONVINCED KING FUCHAI TO HONOUR WU ZIXU BY NOT USING HIM AS A LOWLY ADVISOR BUT IN A MORE PRESTIGIOUS ROLE WHICH, IN ACTUALITY, REDUCED WU ZIXU'S INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS.


IT WAS AROUND THIS TIME THAT SUN WU ALSO LEFT OFFICE AND MOVED OUT FROM WU.

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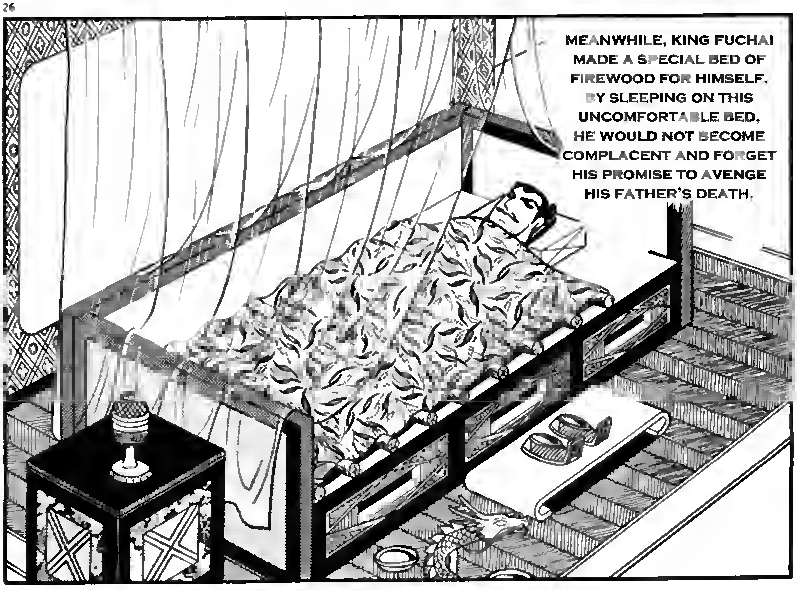
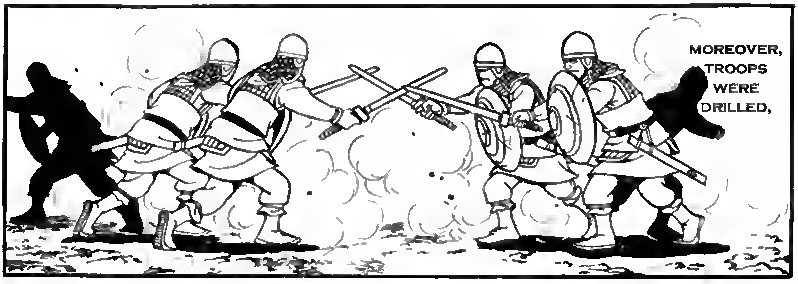
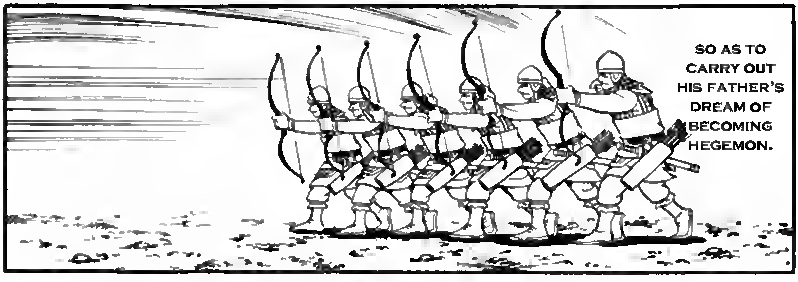

MEANWHILE, KING FUCHAI MADE A SPECIAL BED OF FIREWOOD FOR HIMSELF. BY SLEEPING ON THIS UNCOMFORTABLE BED, HE WOULD NOT BECOME COMPLACENT AND FORGET HIS PROMISE TO AVENGE HIS FATHER'S DEATH.


MOREOVER, TROOPS WERE DRILLED,

ON A REGULAR BASIS,


SO AS TO CARRY OUT HIS FATHER'S DREAM OF BECOMING HEGEMON.

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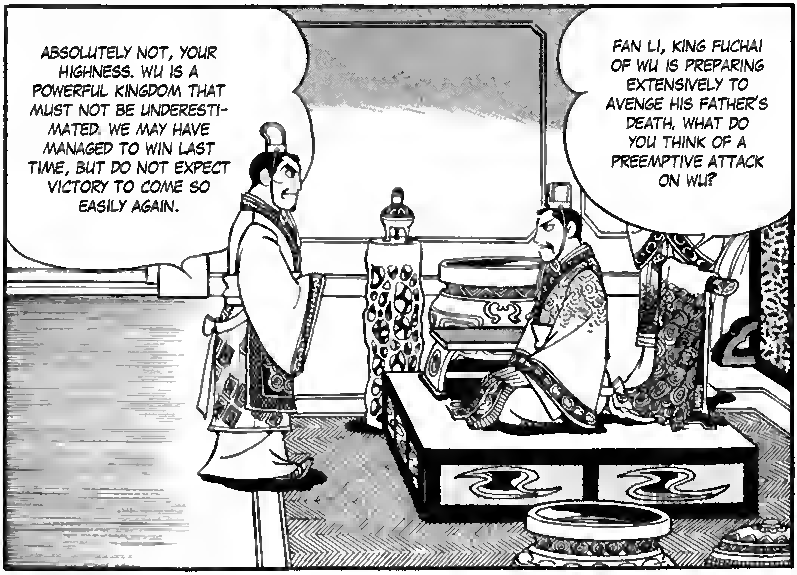
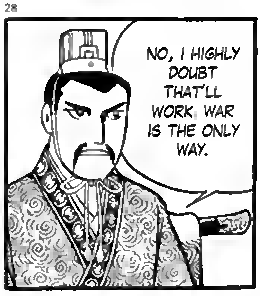
IN THIS WAY, FUCHAI SHOWED HIMSELF TO BE A MODEL KING IN HIS INITIAL YEARS.

YUE, 3RD YEAR OF GOUJIAN'S REIGN (2ND YEAR OF FUCHAI'S REIGN)


ABSOLUTELY NOT, YOUR HIGHNESS. WU IS A POWERFUL KINGDOM THAT MUST NOT BE UNDERESTIMATED. WE MAY HAVE MANAGED TO WIN LAST TIME, BUT DO NOT EXPECT VICTORY TO COME SO EASILY AGAIN.
FAN LI, KING FUCHAI OF WU IS PREPARING EXTENSIVELY TO AVENGE HIS FATHER'S DEATH. WHAT DO YOU THINK OF A PREEMPTIVE ATTACK ON WU?

28


NO, I HIGHLY DOUBT THAT'LL WORK. WAR IS THE ONLY WAY.

HOW ABOUT PEACEFUL NEGOTIATION?
BUT WITH EACH PASSING MOMENT, WU GROWS STRONGER AND OUR END BECOMES MORE CERTAIN.

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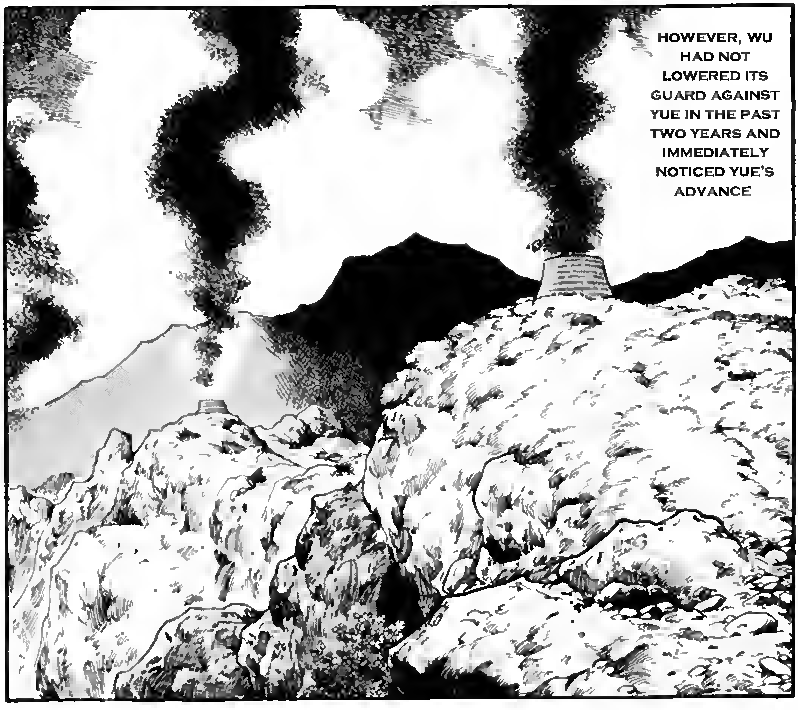
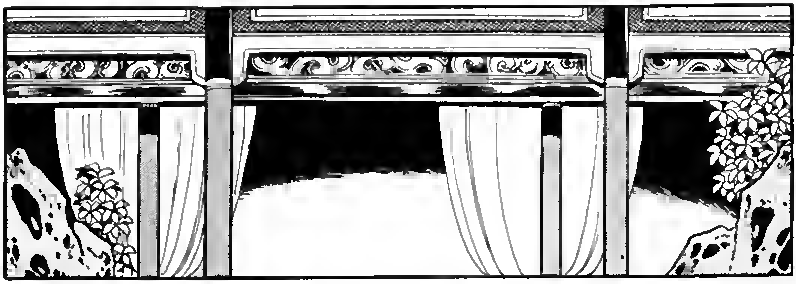
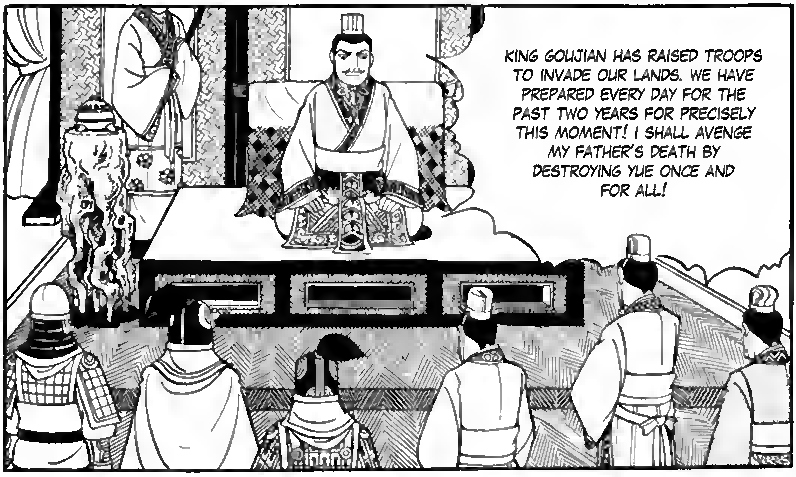
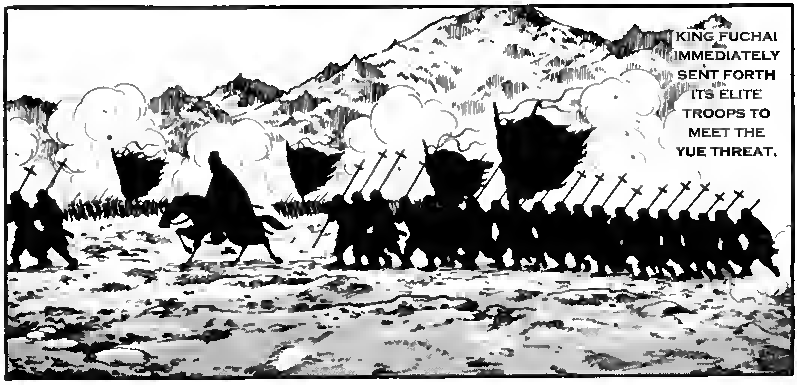
AGAINST HIS MINISTER'S WISHES, KING GOUJIAN INVADED WU.

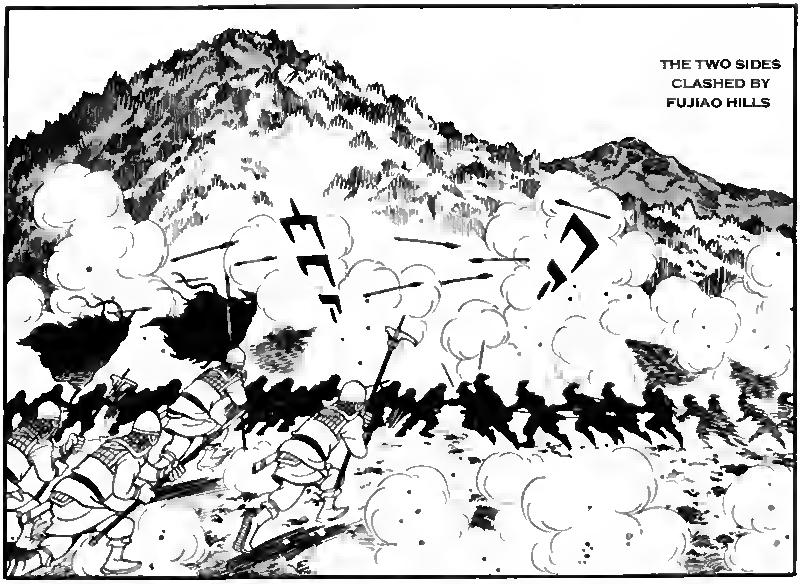
29


HOWEVER, WU HAD NOT LOWERED ITS GUARD AGAINST YUE IN THE PAST TWO YEARS AND IMMEDIATELY NOTICED YUE'S ADVANCE




KING GOUJIAN HAS RAISED TROOPS TO INVADE OUR LANDS. WE HAVE PREPARED EVERY DAY FOR THE PAST TWO YEARS FOR PRECISELY THIS MOMENT! I SHALL AVENGE MY FATHER'S DEATH BY DESTROYING YUE ONCE AND FOR ALL!


KING FUCHAI IMMEDIATELY SENT FORTH ITS ELITE TROOPS TO MEET THE YUE THREAT.


THE TWO SIDES CLASHED BY FUJIAO HILLS

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AGAINST THE WELL-DRILLED WU SOLDIERS, THE YUE SOLDIERS SOON BROKE FORMATION AND RETREATED

31

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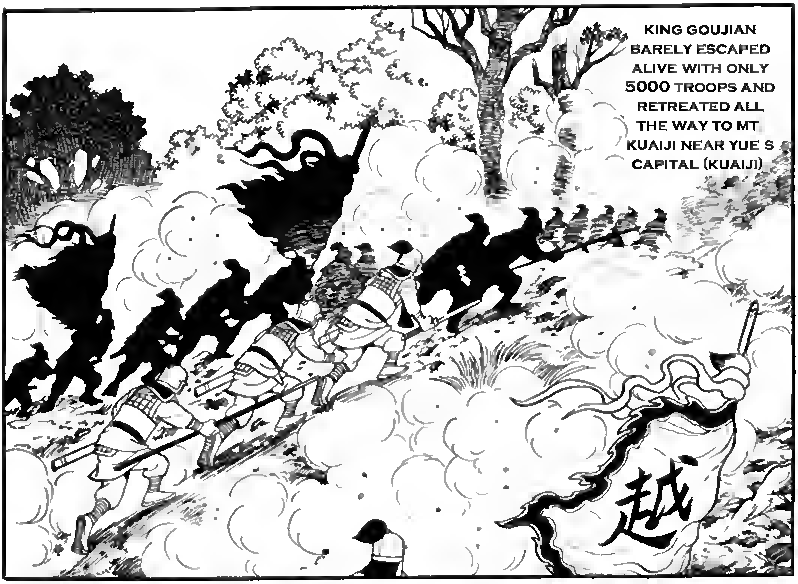
WU TROOPS PURSUED RELENT-LESSLY.


KING GOUJIAN BARELY ESCAPED ALIVE WITH ONLY 5000 TROOPS AND RETREATED ALL THE WAY TO MT. KUAIJI NEAR YUE'S CAPITAL (KUAIJI).
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HOWEVER, THE REMNANT OF THE YUE ARMY FOUND ITSELF SURROUNDED BY THE WU ARMY.
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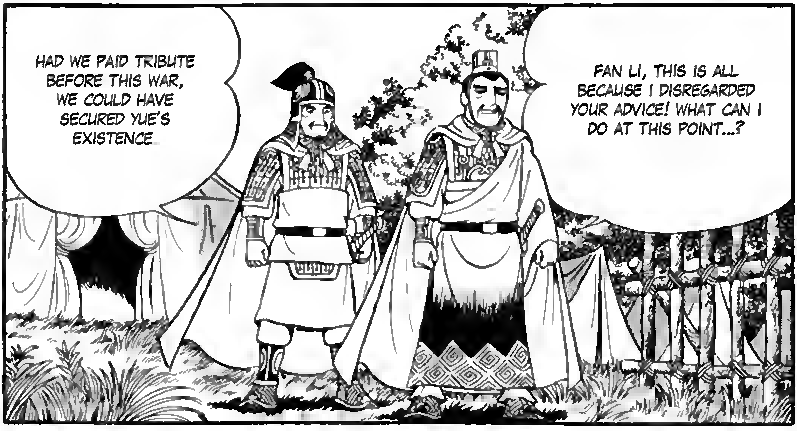
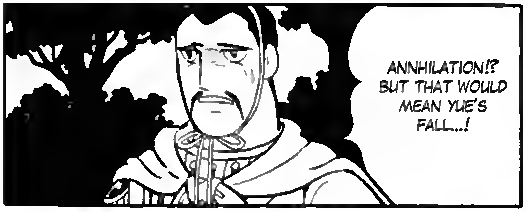
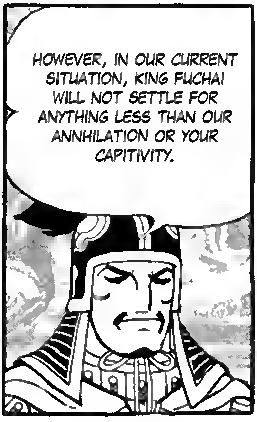

HAD WE PAID TRIBUTE BEFORE THIS WAR, WE COULD HAVE SECURED YUE'S EXISTENCE
FAN LI, THIS IS ALL BECAUSE I DISREGARDED YOUR ADVICE! WHAT CAN I DO AT THIS POINT...?

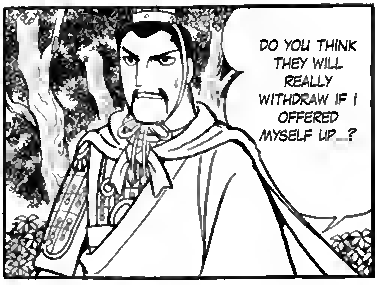
33

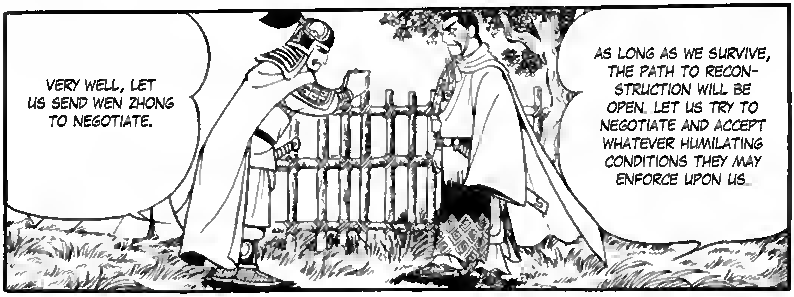

ANNHILATION!? BUT THAT WOULD MEAN YUE'S FALL...!

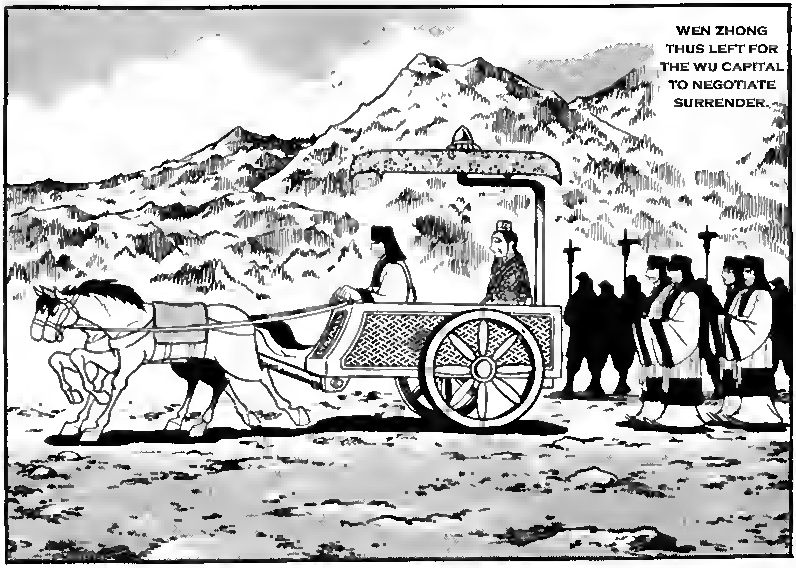
YES, BUT WE ARE PREPARED TO STAND TO THE VERY END WITH YOUR HIGHNESS

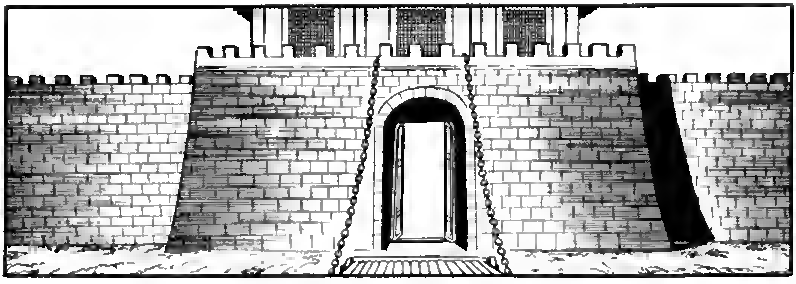

HOWEVER, IN OUR CURRENT SITUATION, KING FUCHA! WILL NOT SETTLE FOR ANYTHING LESS THAN OUR ANNHILATION OR YOUR CAPITIVITY.

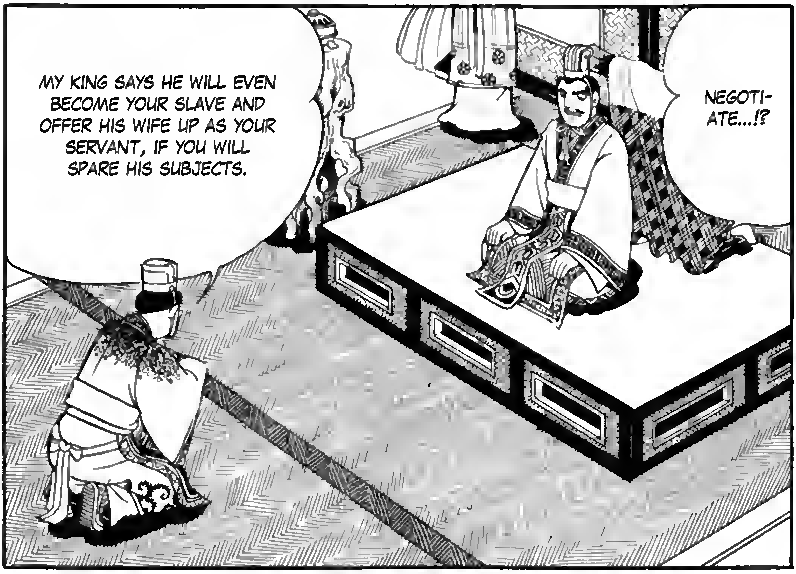
THAT DEPENDS ON HOW NEGOTIATIONS GO. I FEAR THAT THE WILY WU ZIXU WOULD MAKE THAT DIFFICULT TO ACHIEVE.

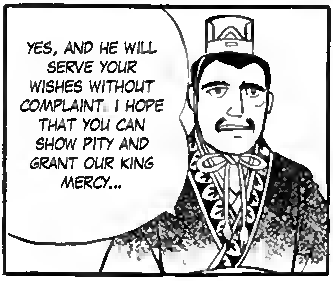

DO YOU THINK THEY WILL REALLY WITHDRAW IF I OFFERED MYSELF UP...?


VERY WELL, LET US SEND WEN ZHONG TO NEGOTIATE.
AS LONG AS WE SURVIVE, THE PATH TO RECONSTRUCTION WILL BE OPEN. LET US TRY TO NEGOTIATE AND ACCEPT WHATEVER HUMILIATING CONDITIONS THEY MAY ENFORCE UPON US.


WEN ZHONG THUS LEFT FOR THE WU CAPITAL TO NEGOTIATE SURRENDER.



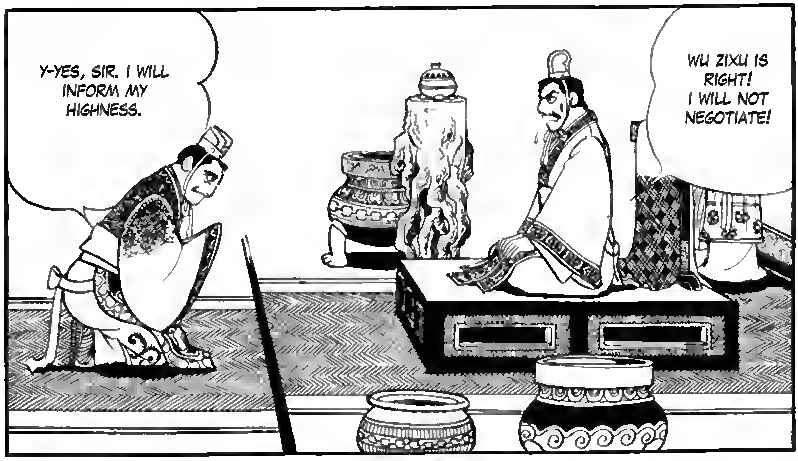

MY KING SAYS HE WILL EVEN BECOME YOUR SLAVE AND OFFER HIS WIFE UP AS YOUR SERVANT, IF YOU WILL SPARE HIS SUBJECTS.
NEGOTIATE...!?


YES, AND HE WILL SERVE YOUR WISHES WITHOUT COMPLAINT. I HOPE THAT YOU CAN SHOW PITY AND GRANT OUR KING MERCY...

HM...

HE'S WILLING TO BE MY SLAVE...!?

YOUR HIGHNESS! THE HEAVENS HAS HANDED YUE ON A SILVER PLATTER TO WU! THERE IS NO NEED TO SHOW MERCY NOW WHEN WE CAN SEIZE THE ENTIRE KINGDOM!


Y-YES, SIR. I WILL INFORM MY HIGHNESS.
WU ZIXU IS RIGHT! I WILL NOT NEGOTIATE!

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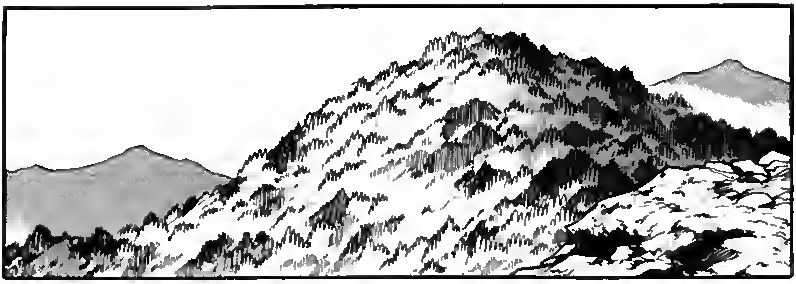
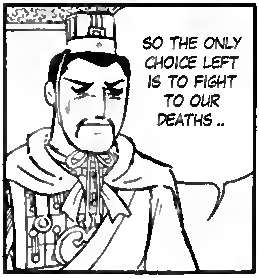
WEN ZHONG FAILED TO ACHIEVE SUCCESS IN WU ZIXU'S PRESENCE.



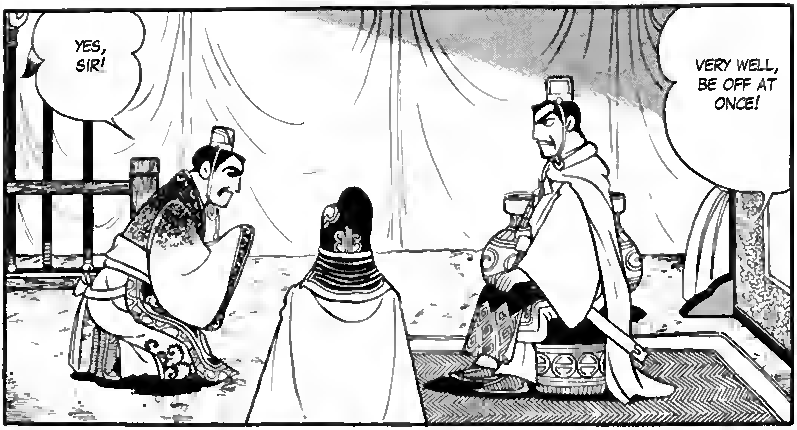

SO THE ONLY CHOICE LEFT IS TO FIGHT TO OUR DEATHS ..

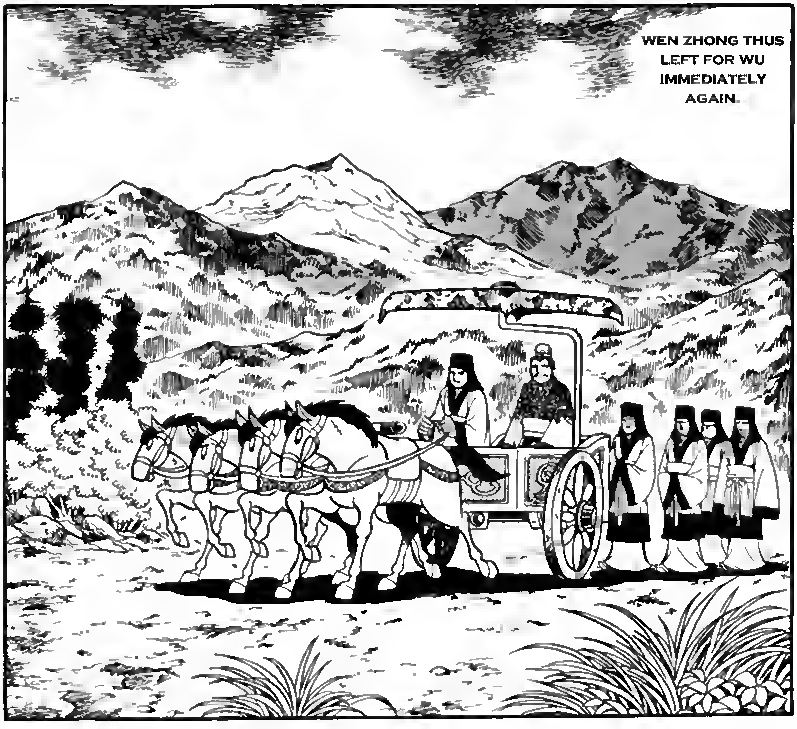
KING FUCHAI SEEMED SWAYED BY THE OFFER, BUT HE CHANGED HIS MIND UPON WU ZIXU'S STERN ADVICE. .
SO THE NEGOTIATIONS FAILED ..

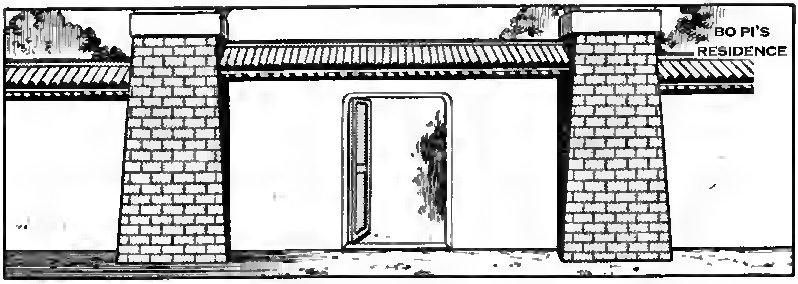
NO, I THINK THERE IS STILL HOPE FOR US.

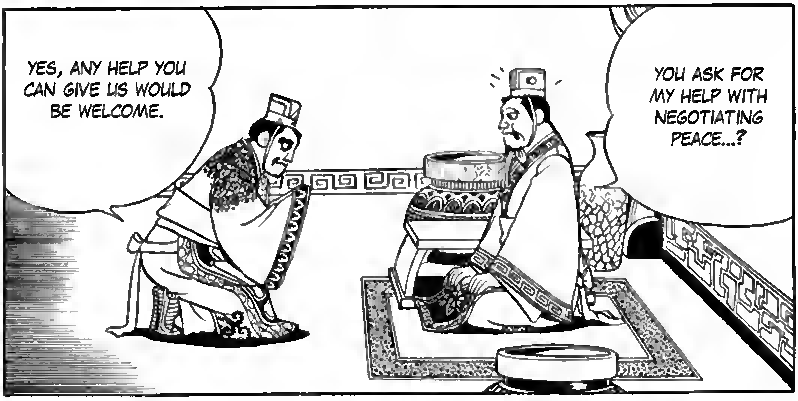
I HEAR THE CURRENT WU CHANCELLOR, BO PI, IS EASILY MOVED BY "MATERIAL GIFTS." ALLOW ME TO GO TO WU ONE MORE TIME AND STRIKE A BACK-DOOR DEAL WITH HIM, YOUR HIGHNESS.

YOU DO?


YES, SIR!
VERY WELL, BE OFF AT ONCE!


WEN ZHONG THUS LEFT FOR WU IMMEDIATELY AGAIN.

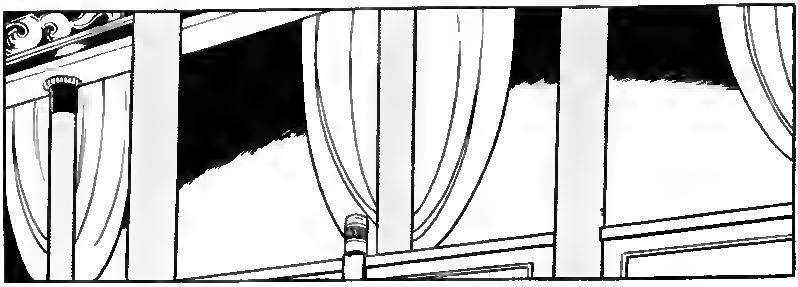

BO PI'S
RESIDENCE

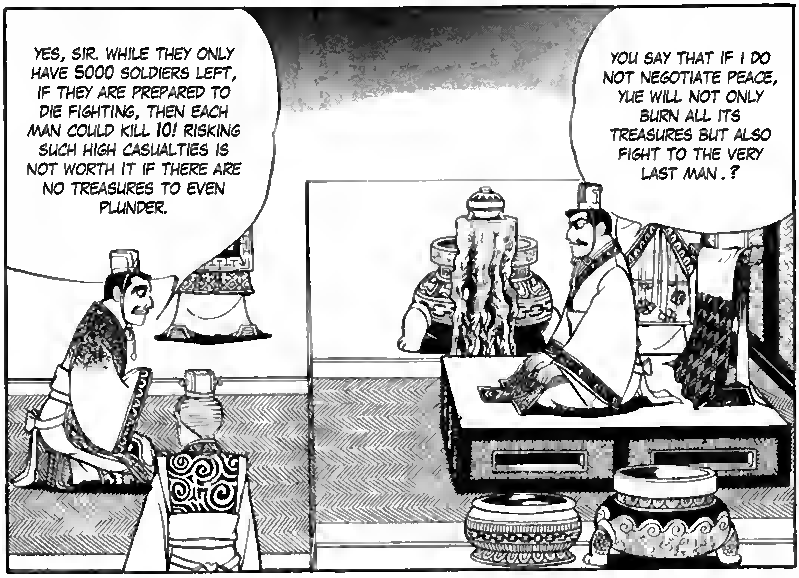

YES, ANY HELP YOU CAN GIVE US WOULD BE WELCOME.
YOU ASK FOR MY HELP WITH NEGOTIATING PEACE...?

39

THIS MAY NOT BE MUCH, BUT PLEASE ACCEPT THESE GIFTS AS A SIGN OF OUR GOODWILL.

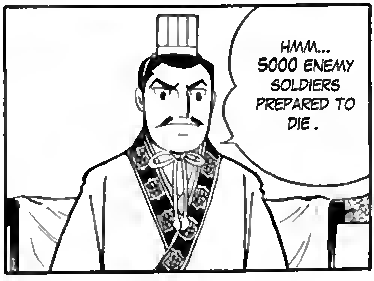
ANNUALLY!?
IF PEACE IS SUCCESSFULLY NEGOTIATED BETWEEN WU AND YUE, WE WILL OF COURSE SEND MORE GIFTS ANNUALLY TO REPAY OUR DEBT TO YOU.
HOWEVER, IF PEACE CANNOT BE NEGOTIATED, MY KING IS PREPARED TO BURN ALL HIS TREASURES AND DIE FIGHTING.
40
THE REMAINING NOBLEMEN AND MINISTERS OF YUE, OF COURSE.
BUT IF I DO HELP WITH THE NEGOTIATIONS AND GOUJIAN BECOMES MY KING'S SLAVE, WHO WILL GUARANTEE THIS PROMISE?
ANNUAL TRIBUTE, HMM...

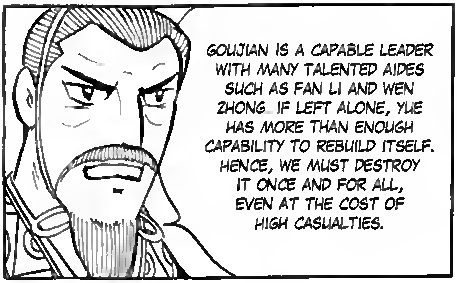


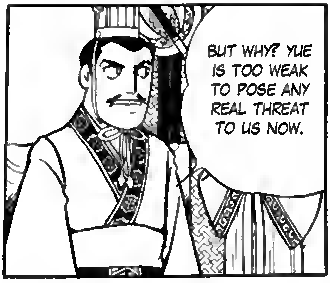

YES, SIR. WHILE THEY ONLY HAVE 5000 SOLDIERS LEFT, IF THEY ARE PREPARED TO DIE FIGHTING, THEN EACH MAN COULD KILL 10! RISKING SUCH HIGH CASUALTIES IS NOT WORTH IT IF THERE ARE NO TREASURES TO EVEN PLUNDER.
YOU SAY THAT IF I DO NOT NEGOTIATE PEACE, YUE WILL NOT ONLY BURN ALL ITS TREASURES BUT ALSO FIGHT TO THE VERY LAST MAN.?

41

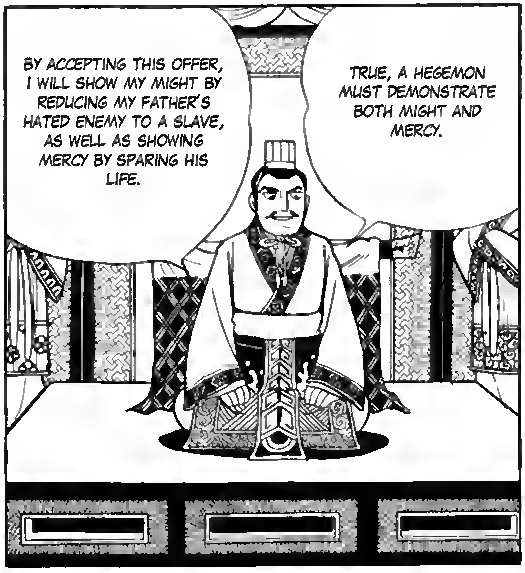
YOU MUST SHOW NO HESITATION, YOUR HIGHNESS! IF YOU DO NOT DESTROY YUE NOW, YOU WILL SURELY REGRET IT IN DUE TIME.


HMM... 5000 ENEMY SOLDIERS PREPARED TO DIE.


GOUJIAN IS A CAPABLE LEADER WITH MANY TALENTED AIDES SUCH AS FAN LI AND WEN ZHONG. IF LEFT ALONE, YUE HAS MORE THAN ENOUGH CAPABILITY TO REBUILD ITSELF. HENCE, WE MUST DESTROY IT ONCE AND FOR ALL, EVEN AT THE COST OF HIGH CASUALTIES.


BUT WHY? YUE IS TOO WEAK TO POSE ANY REAL THREAT TO US NOW.

WU ZIXU, DID YOU FORGET THAT GOUJIAN'S PEACE OFFER WILL MAKE HIM OUR KING'S SLAVE? HOW CAN YOU WORRY OVER WHAT A MERE SLAVE CAN DO?


BY ACCEPTING THIS OFFER, I WILL SHOW MY MIGHT BY REDUCING MY FATHER'S HATED ENEMY TO A SLAVE, AS WELL AS SHOWING MERCY BY SPARING HIS LIFE.
TRUE, A HEGEMON MUST DEMONSTRATE BOTH MIGHT AND MERCY.

YOUR HIGHNESS, IF YOU WISH TO BECOME ACKNOWLEDGED AS THE HEGEMON, YOU MUST SHOW THAT YOU ARE CAPABLE OF BEING MERCIFUL TO THE WEAK AND PITIFUL.

.....
SAY NO MORE!
YOUR HIGHNESS!

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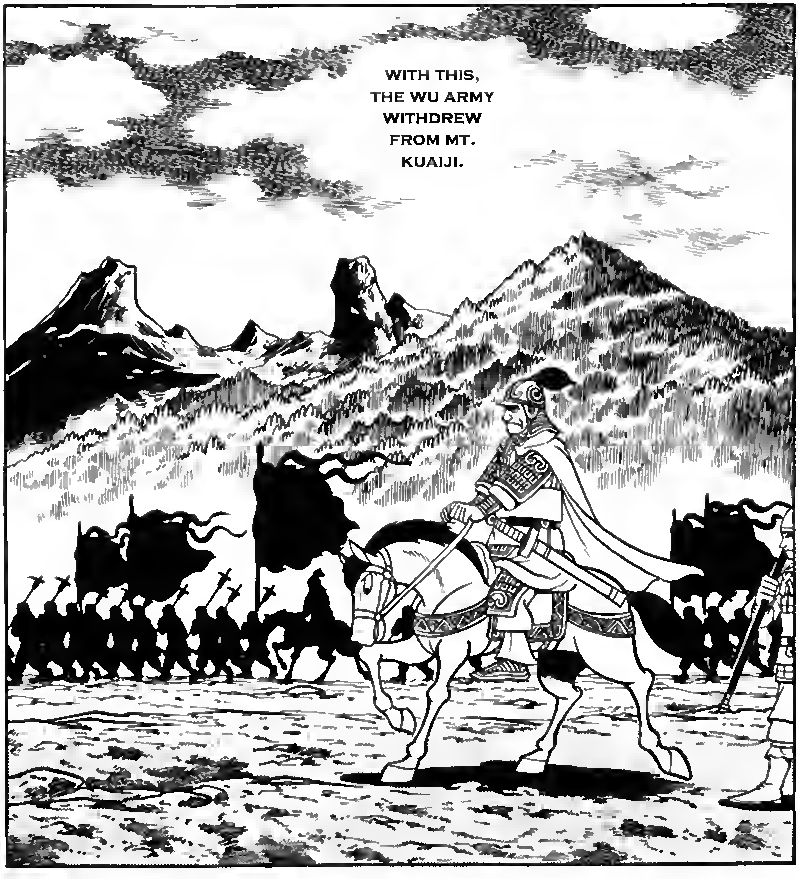
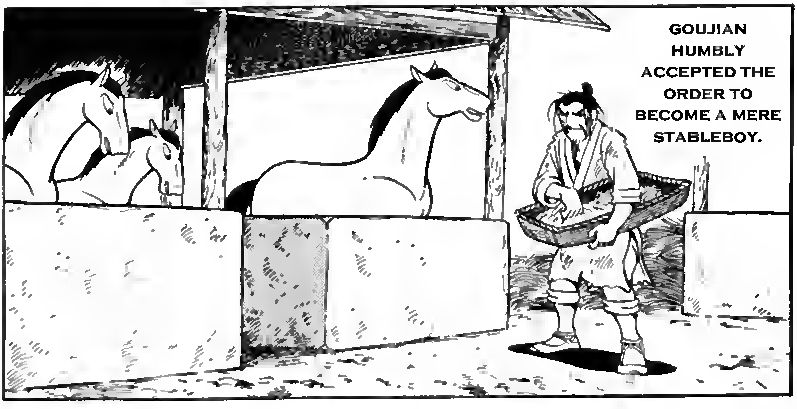
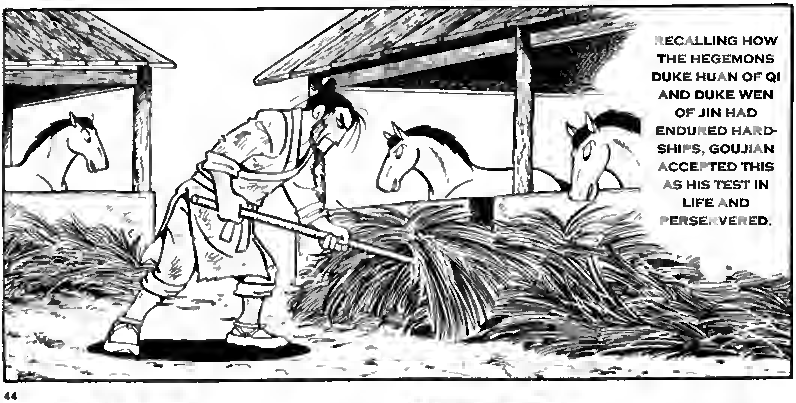
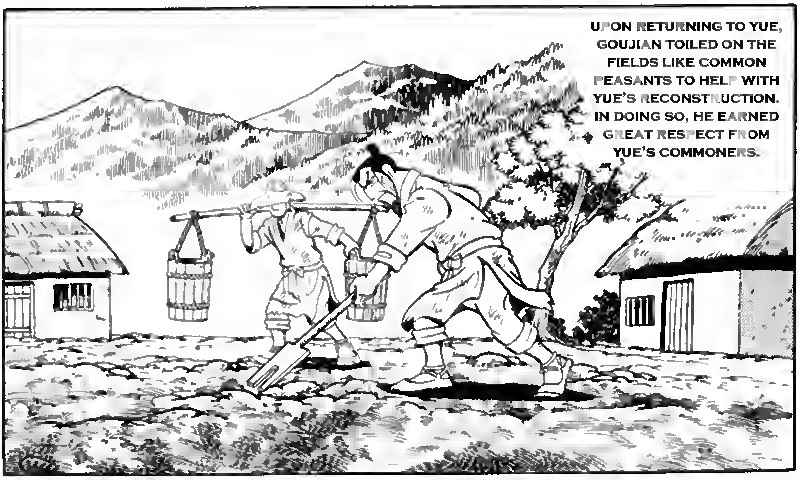

WITH THIS, THE WU ARMY WITHDREW FROM MT. KUAIJI.


GOUJIAN HUMBLY ACCEPTED THE ORDER TO BECOME A MERE STABLEBOY.


RECALLING HOW THE HEGEMONS DUKE HUAN OF QI AND DUKE WEN OF JIN HAD ENDURED HARDSHIPS, GOUJIAN ACCEPTED THIS AS HIS TEST IN LIFE AND PERSEVERED.

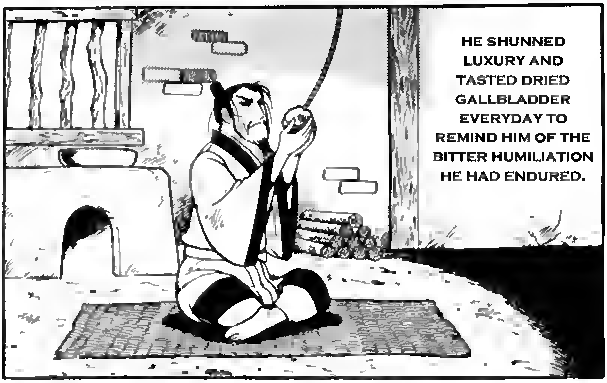
44

AFTER SOME YEARS, GOUJIAN'S LOYAL ADVISOR FAN LI AGREED TO BECOME A HOSTAGE IN WU TO SECURE GOUJIAN'S RETURN. NEEDLESS TO SAY, THIS DEAL WAS STRUCK WITH THE HELP OF ADDITIONAL BRIBES TO BO PI

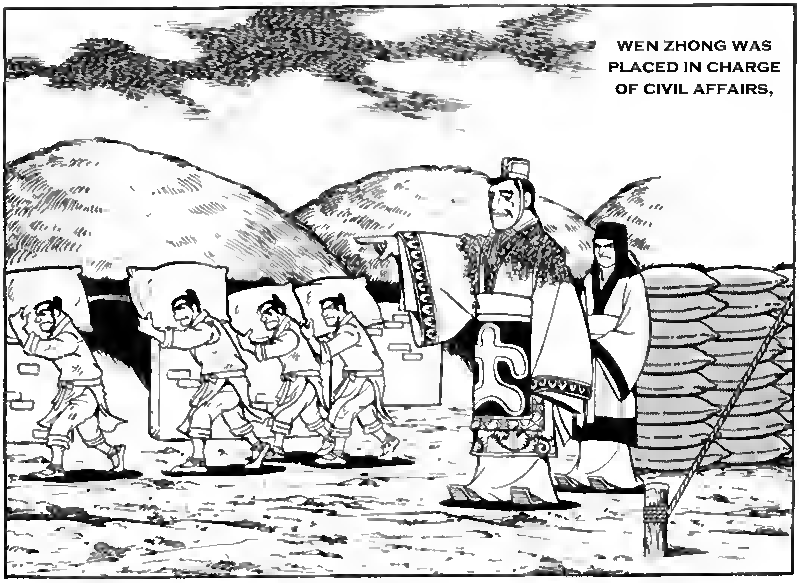

UPON RETURNING TO YUE, GOUJIAN TOILED ON THE FIELDS LIKE COMMON PEASANTS TO HELP WITH YUE'S RECONSTRUCTION. IN DOING SO, HE EARNED GREAT RESPECT FROM YUE'S COMMONERS.

THIS IS THE ORIGIN OF THE IDIOM, 臥薪嘗膽 (WO XIN CHANG DAN). LITERALLY MEANING, "SLEEPING ON FIREWOOD AND LICKING GALLBLADDER," IT REFERS TO THE HARDSHIPS ONE ENDURES FOR SOME PURPOSE.

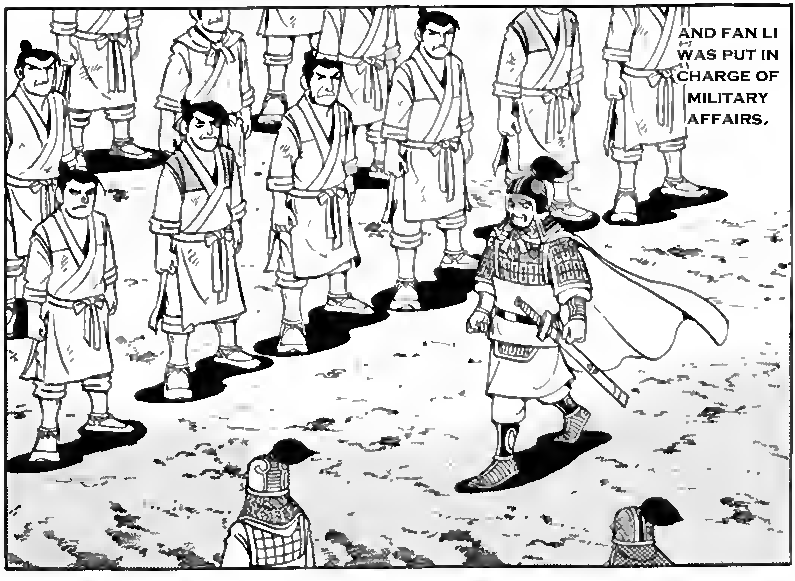
IN THE SHIJI, HOWEVER, THERE IS ACTUALLY NO MENTION OF FUCHAI NOR GOUJIAN "SLEEPING ON FIREWOOD " THIS WAS A LATER ADDITION IN OTHER HISTORICAL WORKS, MOST FAMOUSLY IN 十八史略 (18 HISTORIES IN BRIEF).

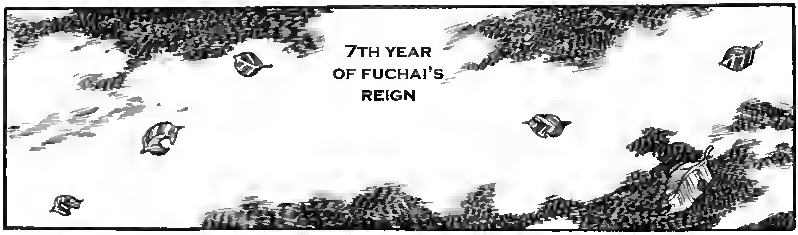


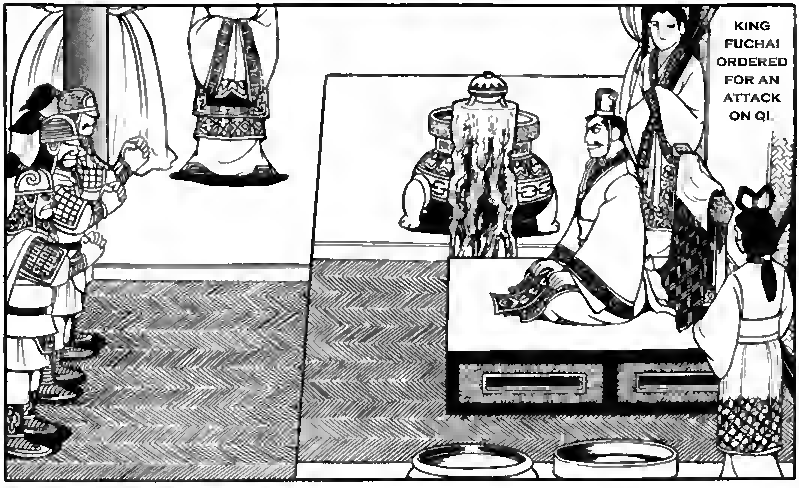
*SU SHI, A FAMOUS SONG DYNASTY LITERATI, WAS THE FIRST ONE TO USE THE PHRASE 臥薪嘗膽 BUT THE "SLEEPING ON FIREWOOD" PART OF THE PHRASE IS A HISTORICALLY VERY CONFUSED AFFAIR. SOME RECORDS STATE THAT IT WAS KING FUCHAI WHO SLEPT ON FIREWOOD (AS YOU SAW ON PAGE 172). WHILE OTHERS STATE THAT IT WAS GOUJIAN WHO DID SO. NEVERTHELESS, AS THESE RECORDS ALL DATE POST-SONG DYNASTY, ONLY "LICKING GALLBLADDER" HAS HISTORICAL CREDIBILITY.


WEN ZHONG WAS PLACED IN CHARGE OF CIVIL AFFAIRS,

46

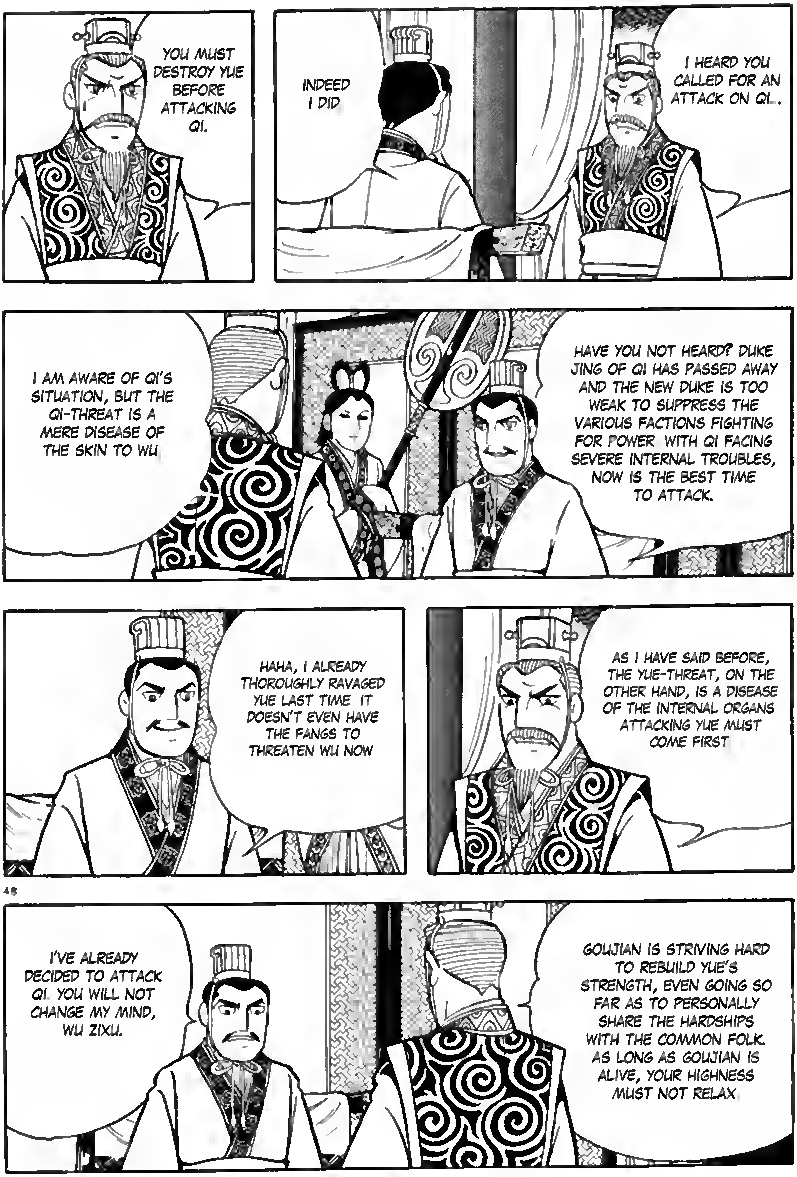

AND FAN LI WAS PUT IN CHARGE OF MILITARY AFFAIRS.

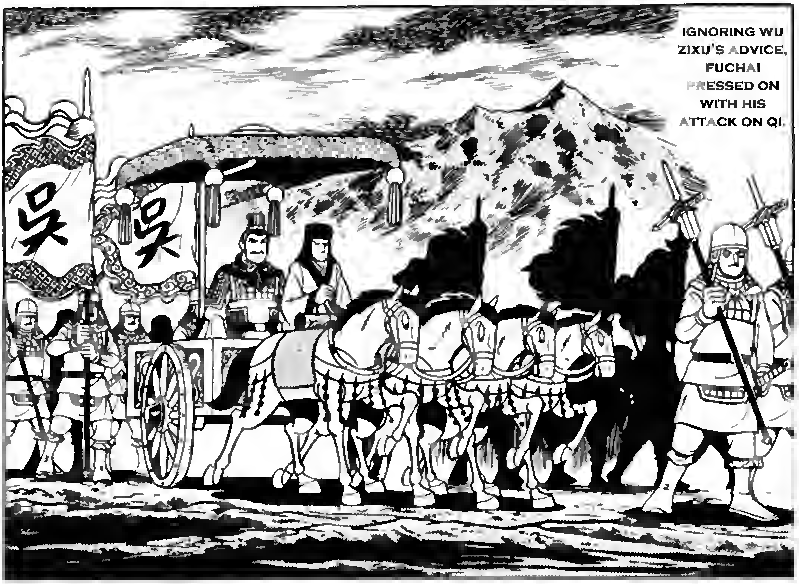

7TH YEAR
OF FUCHAI'S
REIGN

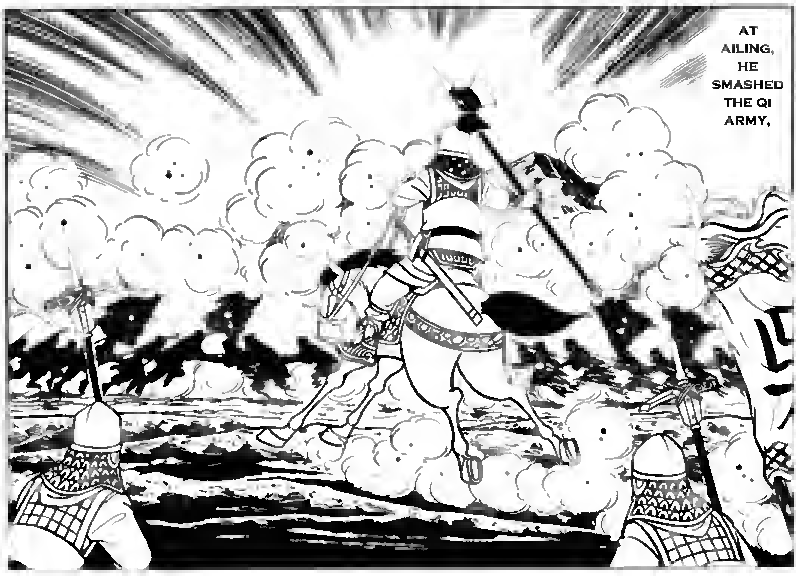

KING
FUCHAI
ORDERED
FOR AN
ATTACK
ON QI.

47

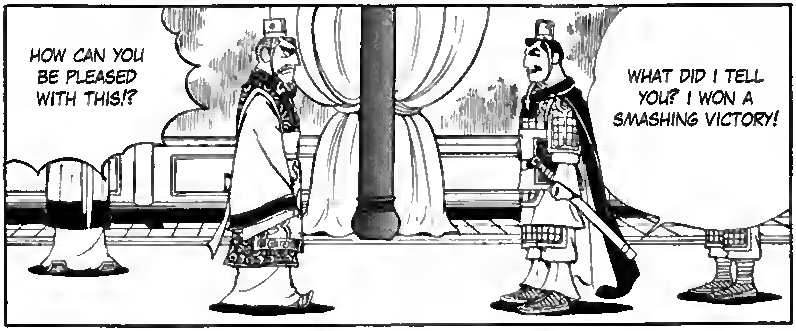
WHAT IS IT,
WU ZIXU?
YOUR
HIGHNESS


YOU MUST DESTROY YUE BEFORE ATTACKING QI.
INDEED I DID
I HEARD YOU CALLED FOR AN ATTACK ON QI..
I AM AWARE OF QI'S SITUATION, BUT THE QI-THREAT IS A MERE DISEASE OF THE SKIN TO WU.
HAVE YOU NOT HEARD? DUKE JING OF QI HAS PASSED AWAY AND THE NEW DUKE IS TOO WEAK TO SUPPRESS THE VARIOUS FACTIONS FIGHTING FOR POWER. WITH QI FACING SEVERE INTERNAL TROUBLES, NOW IS THE BEST TIME TO ATTACK.
HAHA, I ALREADY THOROUGHLY RAVAGED YUE LAST TIME. IT DOESN'T EVEN HAVE THE FANGS TO THREATEN WU NOW.
AS I HAVE SAID BEFORE, THE YUE-THREAT, ON THE OTHER HAND, IS A DISEASE OF THE INTERNAL ORGANS. ATTACKING YUE MUST COME FIRST.
I'VE ALREADY DECIDED TO ATTACK QI. YOU WILL NOT CHANGE MY MIND, WU ZIXU.
GOUJIAN IS STRIVING HARD TO REBUILD YUE'S STRENGTH, EVEN GOING SO FAR AS TO PERSONALLY SHARE THE HARDSHIPS WITH THE COMMON FOLK. AS LONG AS GOUJIAN IS ALIVE, YOUR HIGHNESS MUST NOT RELAX.


吳
吳
IGNORING WU ZIXU'S ADVICE, FUCHAI PRESSED ON WITH HIS ATTACK ON QI.


AT AILING, HE SMASHED THE QI ARMY,

AND RETURNED TRIUMPHANTLY, HAVING CAPTURED QI'S GENERALS AND SUBJUGATED THE LORDS OF ZOU AND LU.

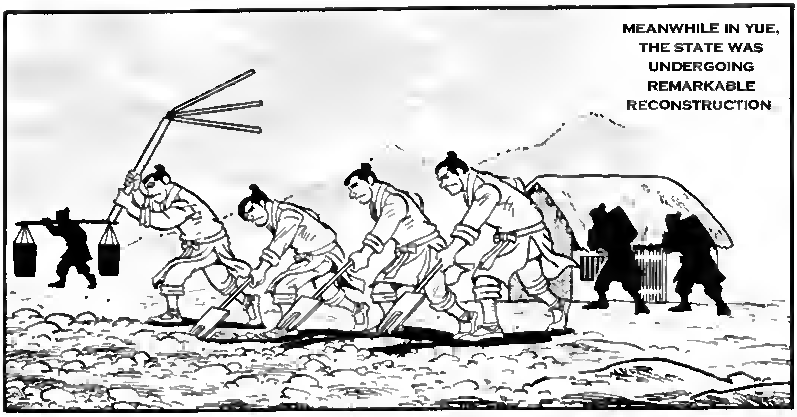

HOW CAN YOU BE PLEASED WITH THIS!?
WHAT DID I TELL YOU? I WON A SMASHING VICTORY!

50

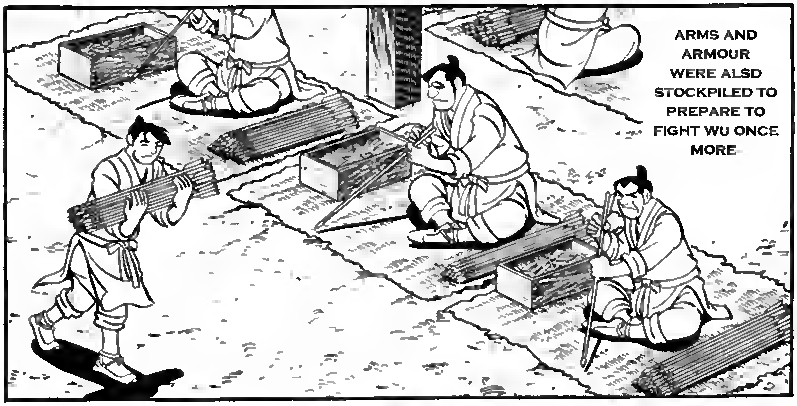
YOU HAVE FOOLISHLY MIRED YOURSELF IN THE SQUABBLES OF THE HEARTLANDS WITHOUT EVEN CONSOLIDATING THE SOUTHLANDS FIRST!

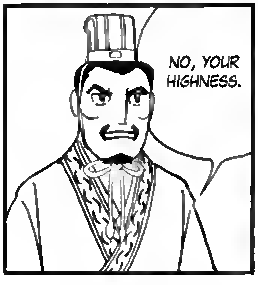
WHAT!?

IT IS THROUGH VIRTUE THAT THE OTHER PEERS OF THE REALM WILL RECOGNIZE SOMEONE AS HEGEMON, NOT BY SHEER BRUTE FORCE.
I WAS DEMONSTRATING MY POWER TO BE ACKNOWLEDGED AS THE NEW HEGEMON!
SILENCE! HOW DARE YOU ADDRESS YOUR KING IN THIS CONTEMPTIBLE MANNER!
AS FOR WU ZIXU, HE GREW TO RESENT THE KING FOR OISREGARDING HIS ADVICE AFTER ALL THE WORK HE PUT TO TRANSFORM WU FROM A MINOR STATE TO A POWERFUL KINGDOM, AS WELL AS CONVINCING HELU THAT FUCHAI SHOULD BE THE NEXT KING.
FUCHAI NOW CHAFED UNDER WU ZIXU'S CONSTANT CRITICISMS.


MEANWHILE IN YUE, THE STATE WAS UNDERGOING REMARKABLE RECONSTRUCTION

ALL PEOPLE, FROM HIGH-BORN TO THE LOW-BORN, ADHERED TO FRUGAL LIVES AND SAVED PLENTY OF GRAIN.


ARMS AND ARMOUR WERE ALSD STOCKPILED TO PREPARE TO FIGHT WU ONCE MORE

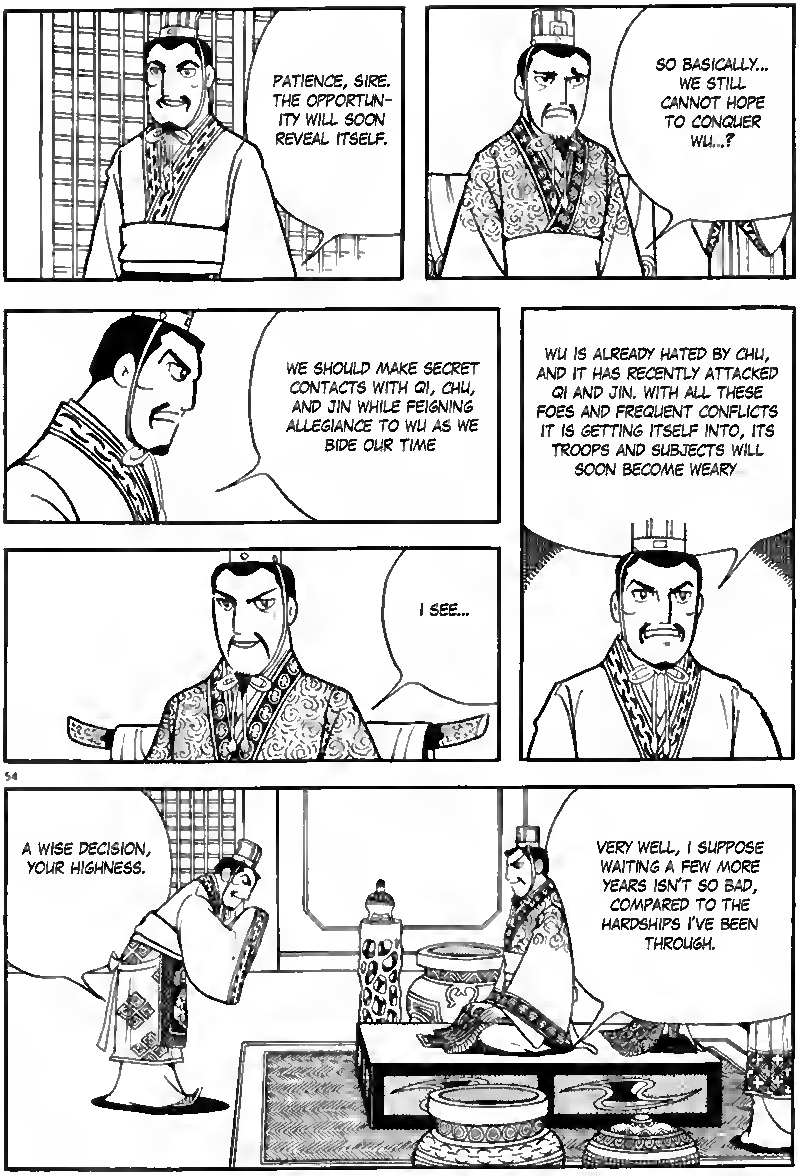

NO, YOUR HIGHNESS.

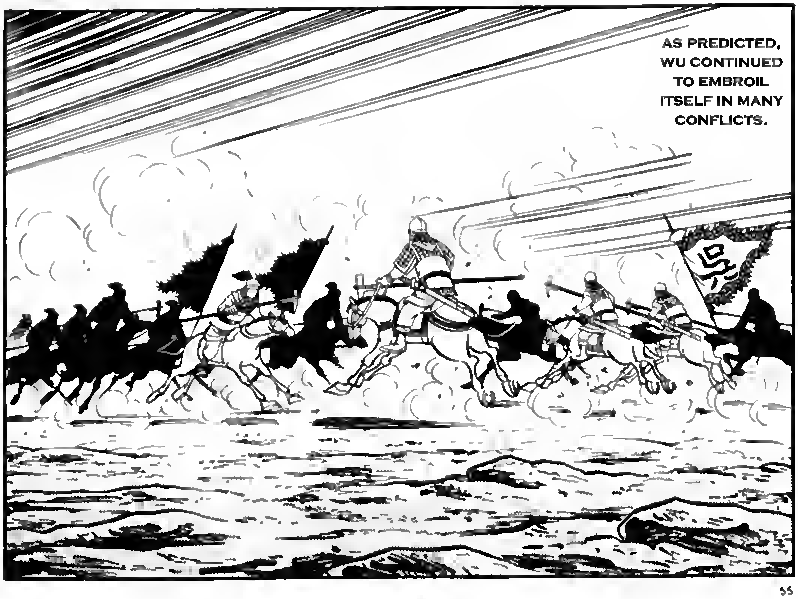
DO YOU THINK IT'S ABOUT TIME WE FINALLY ATTACK WU?

WHY NOT?

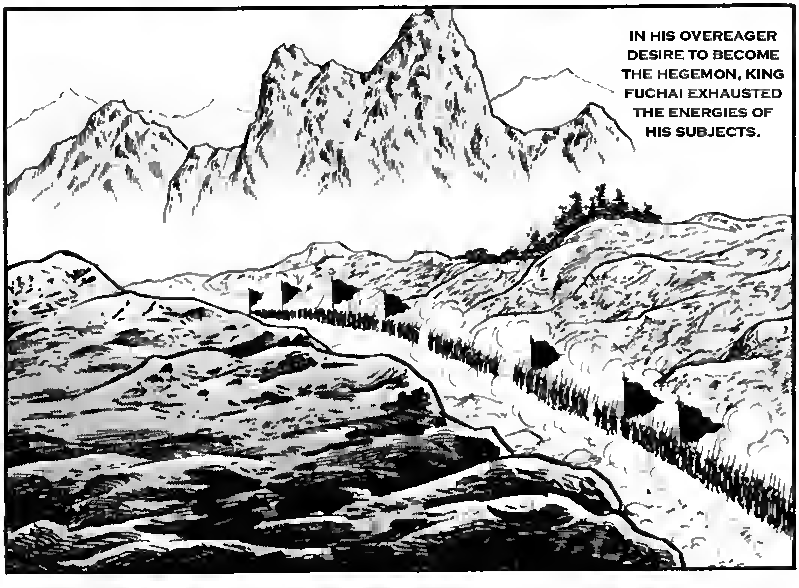
53

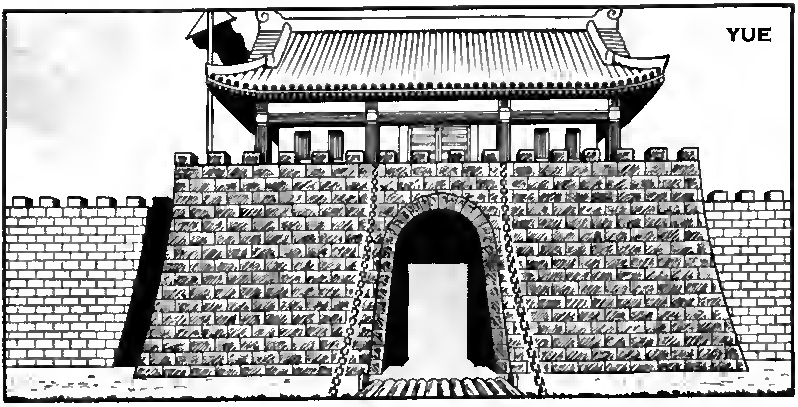
WHILE YUE HAS RECOVERED CONSIDERABLY, IT MUST NOT YET BARE ITS CLAWS AND FANGS AGAINST WU PREMATURELY. JUST AS AN EAGLE DOES NOT REVEAL ITSELF TO PREY, WE MUST FIRST SEE TO IT THAT WU DOES NOT SUSPECT THE SLIGHTEST HOSTILITY FROM US.

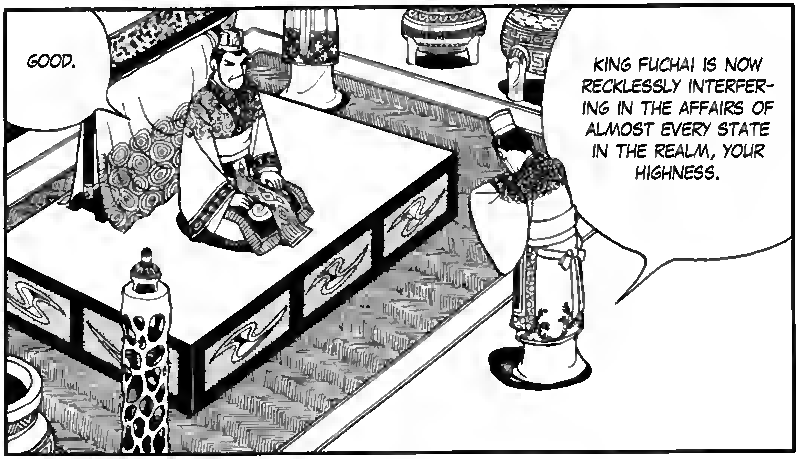

PATIENCE, SIRE. THE OPPORTUNITY WILL SOON REVEAL ITSELF.
SO BASICALLY... WE STILL CANNOT HOPE TO CONQUER WU...?
WE SHOULD MAKE SECRET CONTACTS WITH QI, CHU, AND JIN WHILE FEIGNING ALLEGIANCE TO WU AS WE BIDE OUR TIME
WU IS ALREADY HATED BY CHU, AND IT HAS RECENTLY ATTACKED QI AND JIN. WITH ALL THESE FOES AND FREQUENT CONFLICTS IT IS GETTING ITSELF INTO, ITS TROOPS AND SUBJECTS WILL SOON BECOME WEARY
I SEE...
A WISE DECISION, YOUR HIGHNESS.
VERY WELL, I SUPPOSE WAITING A FEW MORE YEARS ISN'T SO BAD, COMPARED TO THE HARDSHIPS I'VE BEEN THROUGH.


AS PREDICTED, WU CONTINUED TO EMBROIL ITSELF IN MANY CONFLICTS.

55


IN HIS OVEREAGER DESIRE TO BECOME THE HEGEMON, KING FUCHAI EXHAUSTED THE ENERGIES OF HIS SUBJECTS.


YUE

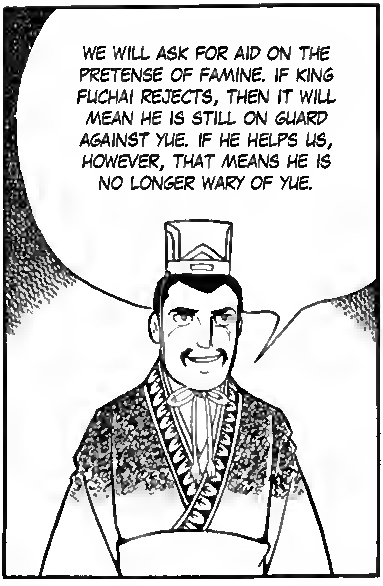

GOOD.
KING FUCHAI IS NOW RECKLESSLY INTERFERING IN THE AFFAIRS OF ALMOST EVERY STATE IN THE REALM, YOUR HIGHNESS.

OH?

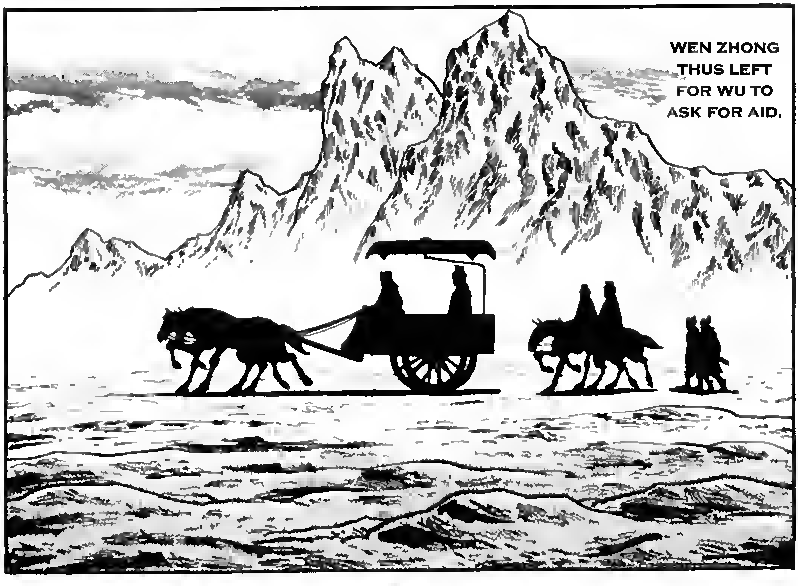
THUS I SUGGEST WE TEST WU'S VIGILANCE TOWARDS US.

AN EXCELLENT PLAN. LET US TRY IT AT ONCE.

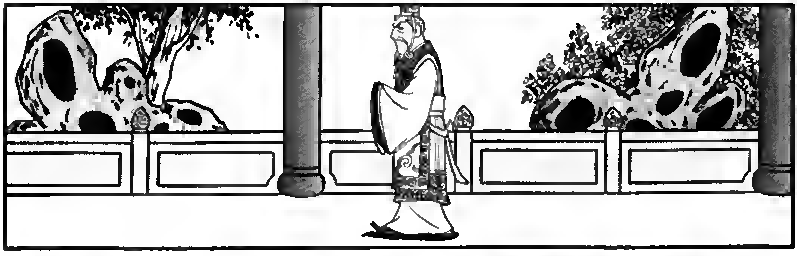
YES, SIR.

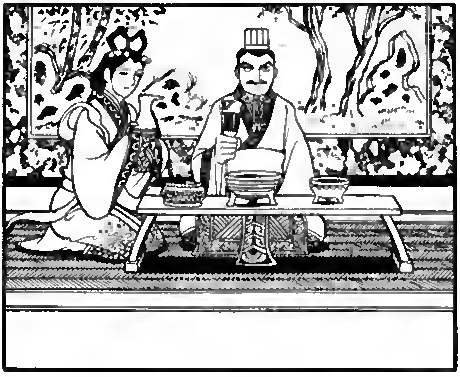

WE WILL ASK FOR AID ON THE PRETENSE OF FAMINE. IF KING FUCHAI REJECTS, THEN IT WILL MEAN HE IS STILL ON GUARD AGAINST YUE. IF HE HELPS US, HOWEVER, THAT MEANS HE IS NO LONGER WARY OF YUE.

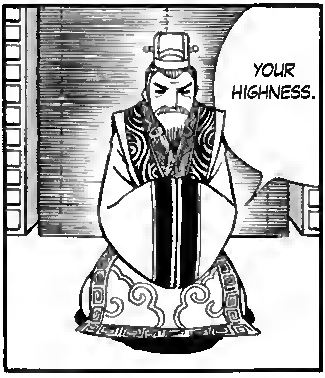
57

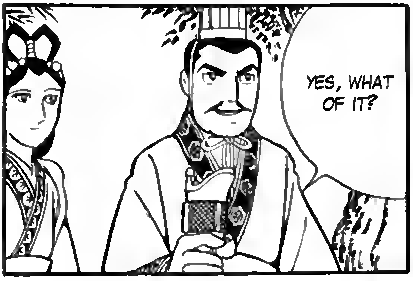

WEN ZHONG THUS LEFT FOR WU TO ASK FOR AID.

THAT'S QUITE SAD TO HEAR.
GOUJIAN REQUESTS FAMINE-RELIEF?
YES, MANY ARE STARVING TO DEATH.
58
THANK YOU, SIR. YOUR BENEVOLENCE WILL SURELY WILL THE RESPECT OF ALL THE PEERS IN THE REALM.
REST ASSURED, I WILL SEND GRAIN.





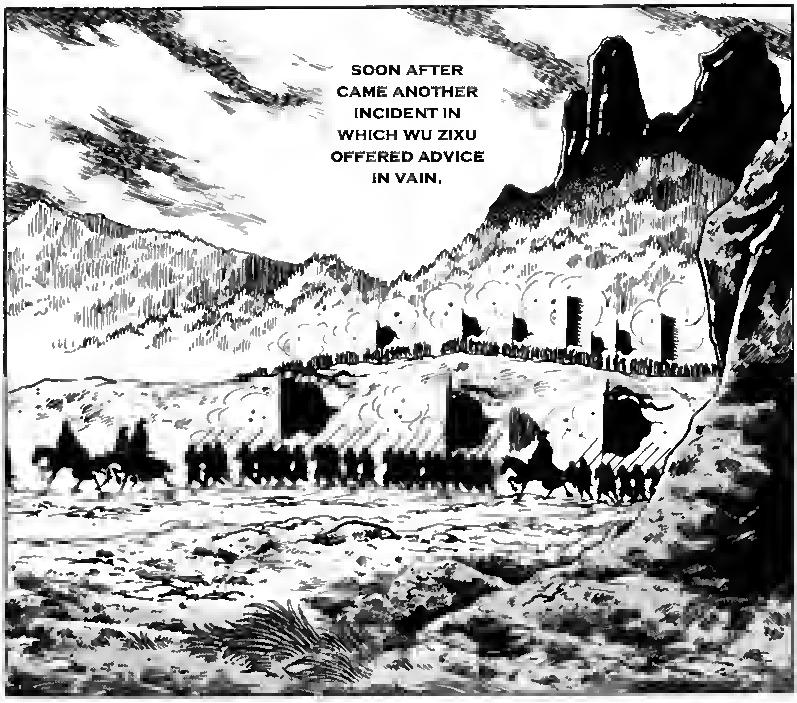

YOUR HIGHNESS.


YES, WHAT OF IT?

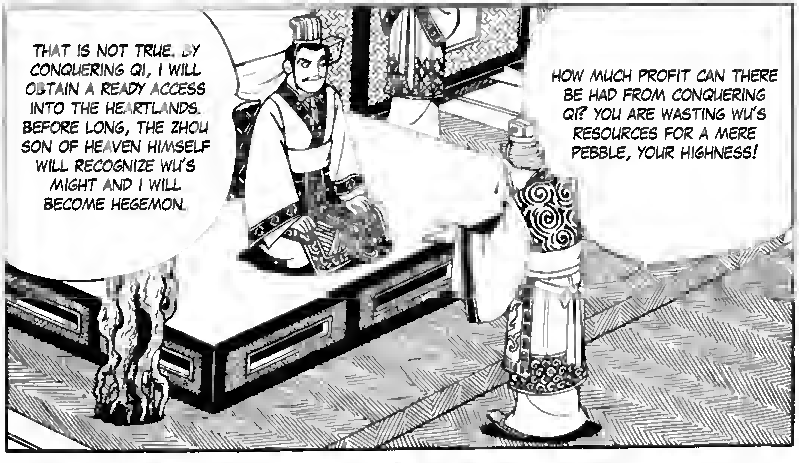
IS IT TRUE YOU CONSENTED TO SEND FAMINE-RELIEF TO YUE?

I SWEAR YOU LOSE YOUR HEAD WHEN IT COMES TO YUE. IT HAS REMAINED A LOYAL SUBORDINATE FOR SO MANY YEARS NOW.
YUE IS THE ONE STATE THAT WU MUST REMAIN ON GUARD AGAINST AT ALL TIMES. IF YOU WILL NOT DESTROY IT, AT THE VERY LEAST, YOU MUST NOT AID IT IN ANY WAY.
YOU MUST RESCIND THAT ORDER AT ONCE!
WHY?
I ALREADY GAVE MY WORD AS KING TO SEND GRAIN. HOW CAN I BREAK MY PROMISE SO SOON!?
THAT IS A MERE ACT TO GET US TO LOWER OUR GUARDS.
ALLY!? YOU SERIOUSLY THINK YUE IS AN ALLY!? IT WILL STAB WU IN THE BACK THE FIRST CHANCE IT SEES!
DID YOU NOT SAY ONE CAN ONLY BE HEGEMON THROUGH BENEVOLENCE? IT IS MY DUTY TO LOOK AFTER MY ALLIES

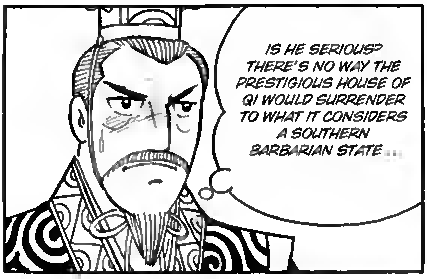
THE CHOICE IS ALREADY MADE! I AM YOUR KING AND YOU WILL RESPECT MY DECISIONS!
ALAS, THE FATE OF WU IS SEALED NOW THAT EVEN WELL-MEANING ADVICE IS IGNORED...
YES, SIR.
WU ZIXU COMPLAINED AGAIN?
61
HAHA, THIS IS AN EXCELLENT CHANCE TO FINALLY OUST THAT OLD HAS-BEEN FROM COURT ONCE AND FOR ALL.


SOON AFTER CAME ANOTHER INCIDENT IN WHICH WU ZIXU OFFERED ADVICE IN VAIN.

62

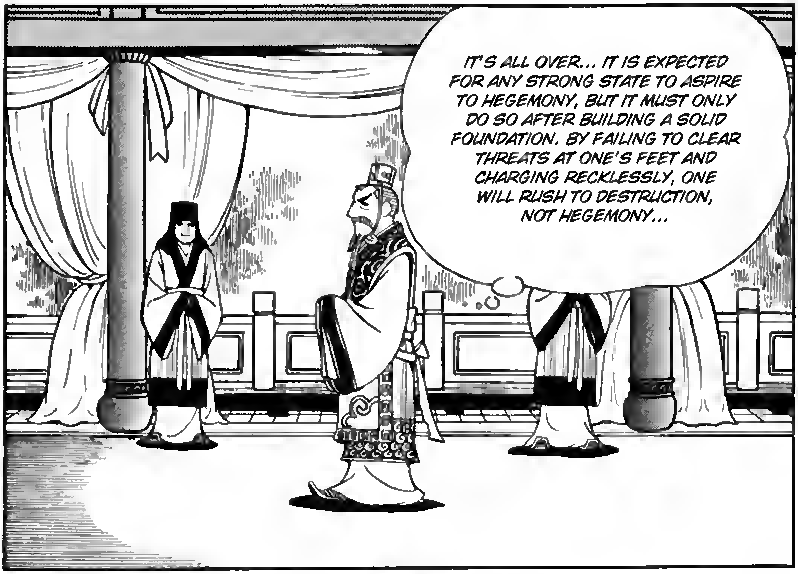

THAT IS NOT TRUE. BY CONQUERING QI, I WILL OBTAIN A READY ACCESS INTO THE HEARTLANDS. BEFORE LONG, THE ZHOU SON OF HEAVEN HIMSELF WILL RECOGNIZE WU'S MIGHT AND I WILL BECOME HEGEMON.
HOW MUCH PROFIT CAN THERE BE HAD FROM CONQUERING QI? YOU ARE WASTING WU'S RESOURCES FOR A MERE PEBBLE, YOUR HIGHNESS!

WHAT!?
NOW YOU ARE TO GO TO QI AND ASK FOR ITS SURRENDER.


IS HE SERIOUS? THERE'S NO WAY THE PRESTIGIOUS HOUSE OF QI WOULD SURRENDER TO WHAT IT CONSIDERS A SOUTHERN BARBARIAN STATE...

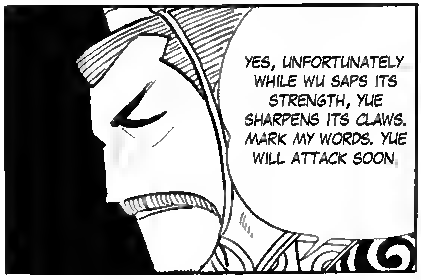
MAKE IT CLEAR THAT I WILL ATTACK THOROUGHLY IF IT REFUSES.

63


IT'S ALL OVER... IT IS EXPECTED FOR ANY STRONG STATE TO ASPIRE TO HEGEMONY, BUT IT MUST ONLY DO SO AFTER BUILDING A SOLID FOUNDATION. BY FAILING TO CLEAR THREATS AT ONE'S FEET AND CHARGING RECKLESSLY, ONE WILL RUSH TO DESTRUCTION, NOT HEGEMONY...

WU IS NOW WALKING ON THE PATH TO DESTRUCTION. THERE'S NO NEED FOR YOU TO REMAIN IN THIS ROTTING KINGDOM. I WILL FIND YOU A HOME IN QI.

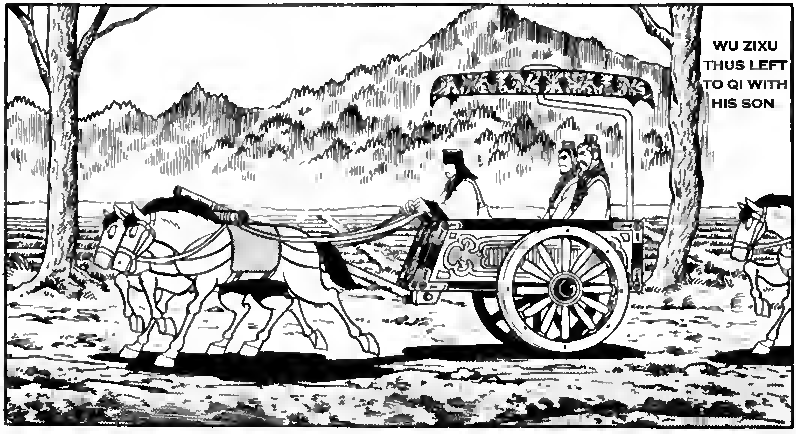
YES, FATHER.
SON, I'VE BEEN ORDERED TO GO TO QI AS AN ENVOY AND I WANT YOU TO ACCOMPANY ME


YES, UNFORTUNATELY WHILE WU SAPS ITS STRENGTH, YUE SHARPENS ITS CLAWS. MARK MY WORDS. YUE WILL ATTACK SOON.

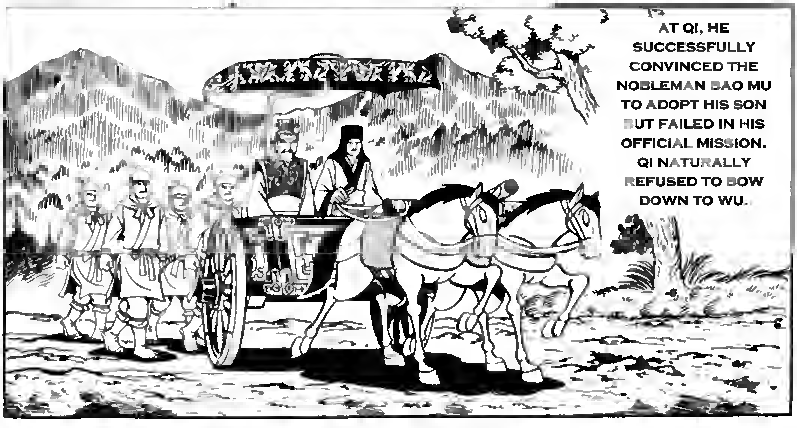
WU WILL BE DESTROYED!?

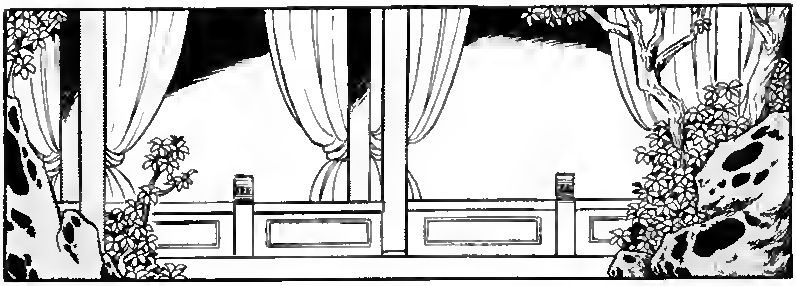
I BUILT THIS KINGDOM ALONG WITH THE FORMER KING. I CANNOT SIMPLY ABANDON IT NOW. I WILL SEE THROUGH ITS END.

BUT THEN, WHY NOT LIVE IN QI WITH ME?


WU ZIXU THUS LEFT TO QI WITH HIS SON

65


AT QI, HE SUCCESSFULLY CONVINCED THE NOBLEMAN BAO MU TO ADOPT HIS SON BUT FAILED IN HIS OFFICIAL MISSION. QI NATURALLY REFUSED TO BOW DOWN TO WU.

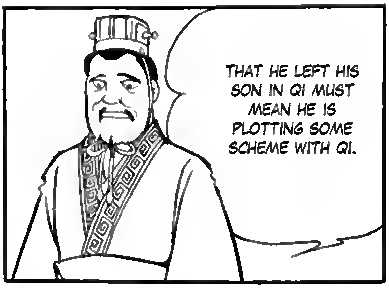


YES, IT IS CLEAR THAT DESPITE HOW HE ACTS, HE IS A DISLOYAL SUBJECT PLOTTING WU'S DOWNFALL.
WU ZIXU LEFT HIS SON TO LIVE IN QI!?

66

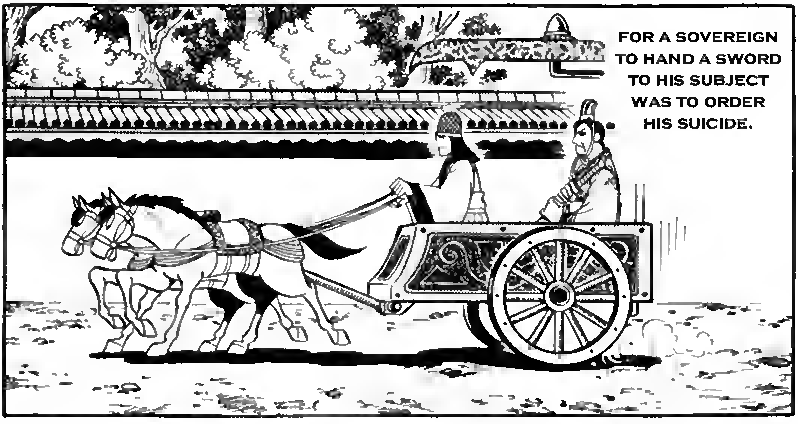
HE IS EVEN SO DESPICABLE TO HAVE ONCE DESECRATED A CORPSE BY WHIPPING IT SENSELESSLY! AS YOU HAVE ENRAGED HIM OVER THE YEARS BY DISREGARDING HIS ADVICE, WHO KNOWS WHAT HE MIGHT END UP DOING TO YOU?
THINK ABOUT IT, YOUR HIGHNESS. HE IS A COLD MAN WHO ABANDONED EVEN HIS FATHER AND BROTHER TO THEIR DEATHS. IF HE CANNOT REMAIN LOYAL TO HIS FAMILY, HOW CAN HE REMAIN LOYAL TO WU?

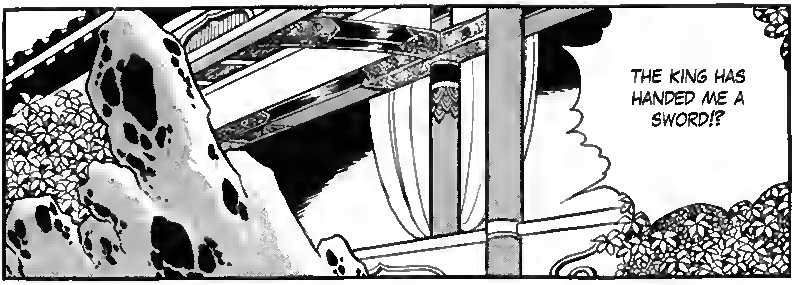
UNFOR-
GIVABLE!


THAT HE LEFT HIS SON IN QI MUST MEAN HE IS PLOTTING SOME SCHEME WITH QI.

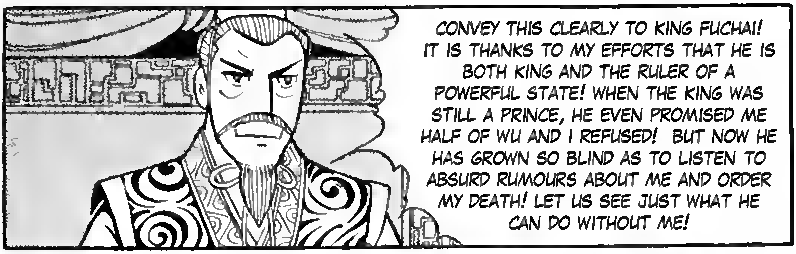
YES, YOUR HIGHNESS.
HAND THIS SWORD TO WU ZIXU!

67

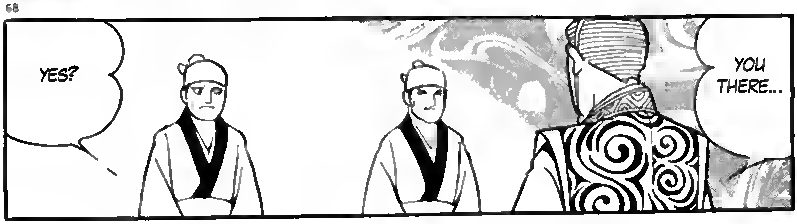

FOR A SOVEREIGN TO HAND A SWORD TO HIS SUBJECT WAS TO ORDER HIS SUICIDE.


THE KING HAS HANDED ME A SWORD!?

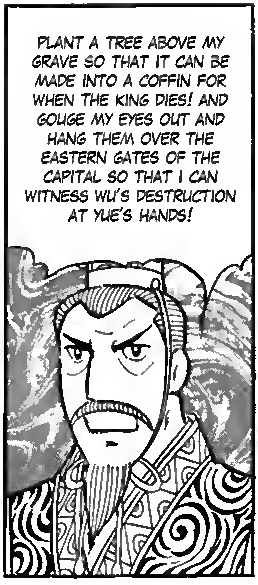
THAT FOOL...!


CONVEY THIS CLEARLY TO KING FUCHAI! IT IS THANKS TO MY EFFORTS THAT HE IS BOTH KING AND THE RULER OF A POWERFUL STATE! WHEN THE KING WAS STILL A PRINCE, HE EVEN PROMISED ME HALF OF WU AND I REFUSED! BUT NOW HE HAS GROWN SO BLIND AS TO LISTEN TO ABSURD RUMOURS ABOUT ME AND ORDER MY DEATH! LET US SEE JUST WHAT HE CAN DO WITHOUT ME!

68


YES?
YOU THERE...

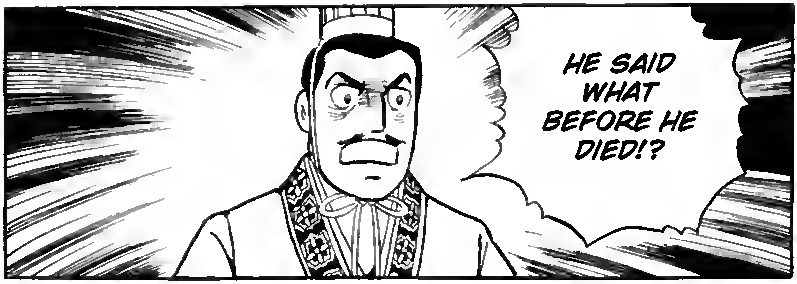
MAKE SURE TO CONVEY EVERY LAST WORD I JUST SAID TO THE KING!

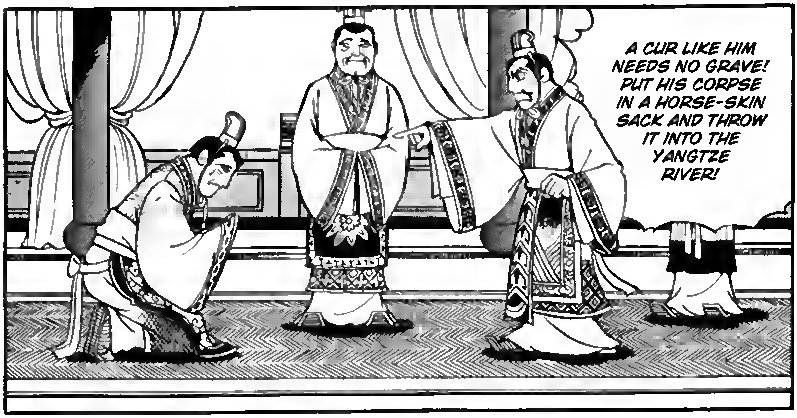

PLANT A TREE ABOVE MY GRAVE SO THAT IT CAN BE MADE INTO A COFFIN FOR WHEN THE KING DIES! AND GOUGE MY EYES OUT AND HANG THEM OVER THE EASTERN GATES OF THE CAPITAL SO THAT I CAN WITNESS WU'S DESTRUCTION AT YUE'S HANDS!

Y-YES, SIR.

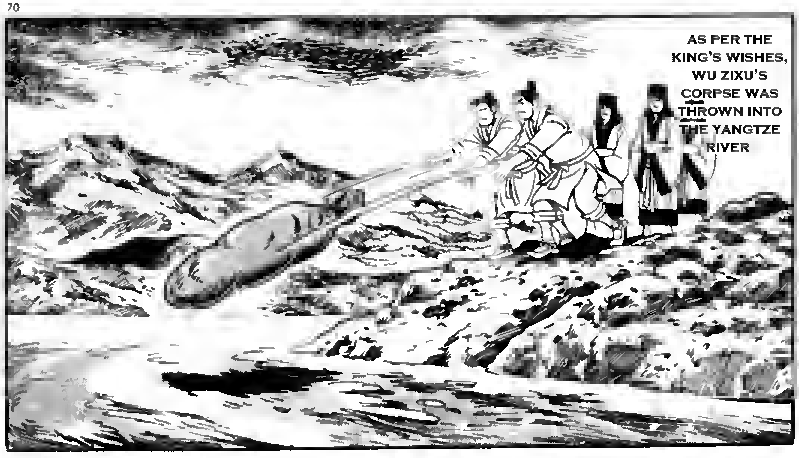
69

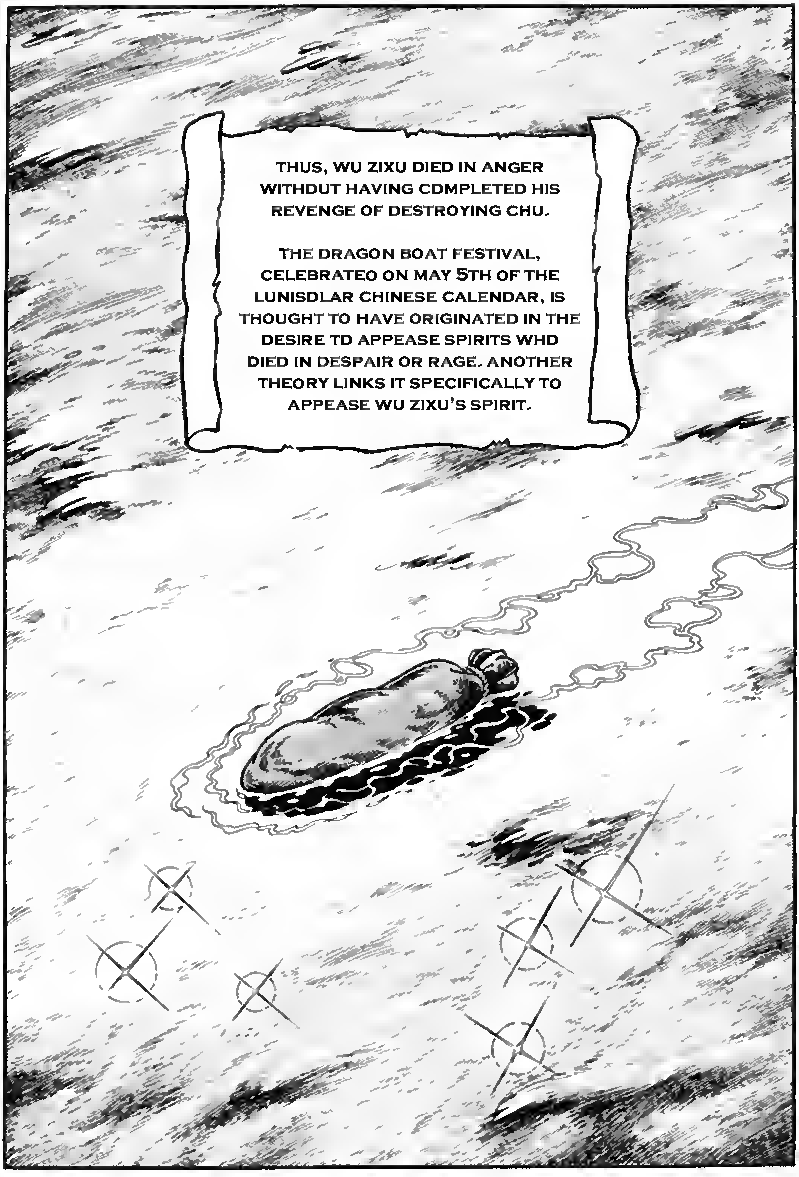
WITH THAT, WU ZIXU ENDED HIS LIFE.


HE SAID WHAT BEFORE HE DIED!?


A CUR LIKE HIM NEEDS NO GRAVE! PUT HIS CORPSE IN A HORSE-SKIN SACK AND THROW IT INTO THE YANGTZE RIVER!

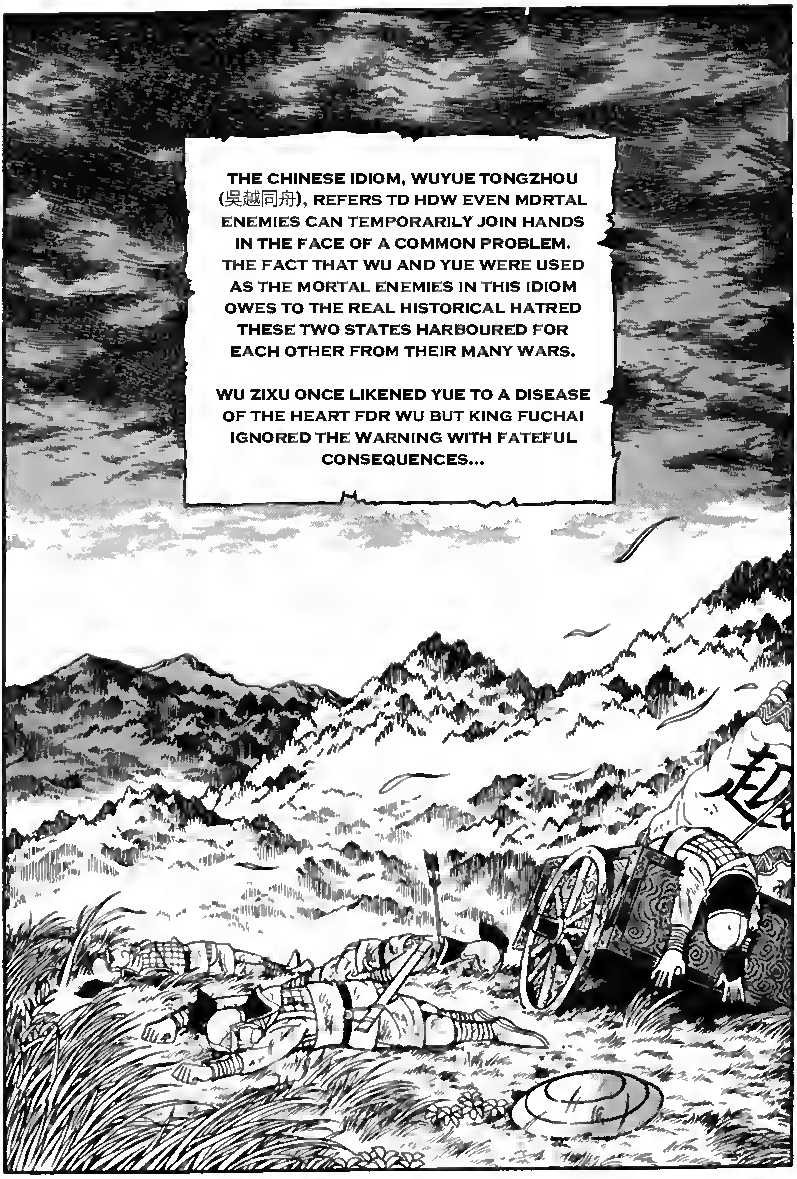
70


AS PER THE KING'S WISHES, WU ZIXU'S CORPSE WAS THROWN INTO THE YANGTZE RIVER


THUS, WU ZIXU DIED IN ANGER WITHDUT HAVING CDMPLETED HIS REVENGE OF DESTROYING CHU.
THE DRAGON BOAT FESTIVAL, CELEBRATEO ON MAY 5TH OF THE LUNISDLAR CHINESE CALENDAR, IS THOUGHT TO HAVE ORIGINATED IN THE DESIRE TD APPEASE SPIRITS WHD DIED IN DESPAIR OR RAGE. ANOTHER THEORY LINKS IT SPECIFICALLY TO APPEASE WU ZIXU'S SPIRIT.

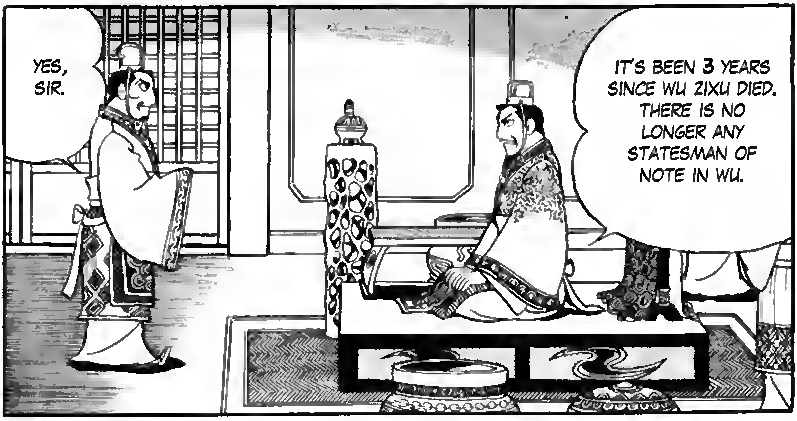
Chapter 3

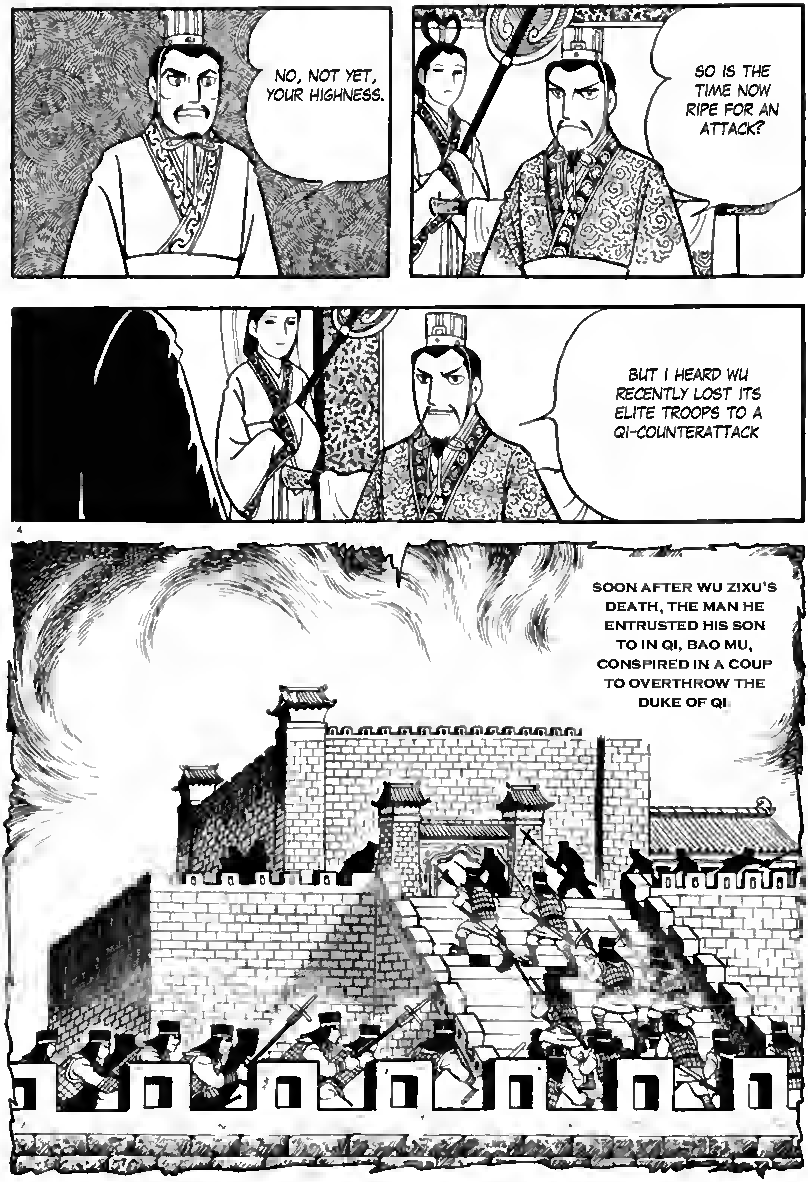
Fall of Wu


THE CHINESE IDIOM, WUYUE TONGZHOU (吳越同舟), REFERS TO HOW EVEN MORTAL ENEMIES CAN TEMPORARILY JOIN HANDS IN THE FACE OF A COMMON PROBLEM. THE FACT THAT WU AND YUE WERE USED AS THE MORTAL ENEMIES IN THIS IDIOM OWES TO THE REAL HISTORICAL HATRED THESE TWO STATES HARBOURED FOR EACH OTHER FROM THEIR MANY WARS.
WU ZIXU ONCE LIKENED YUE TO A DISEASE OF THE HEART FOR WU BUT KING FUCHAI IGNORED THE WARNING WITH FATEFUL CONSEQUENCES...

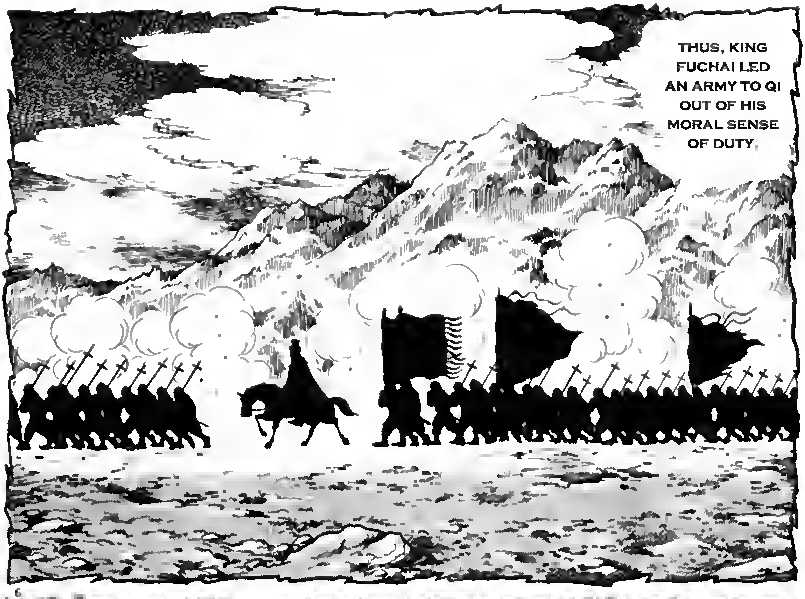
YUE

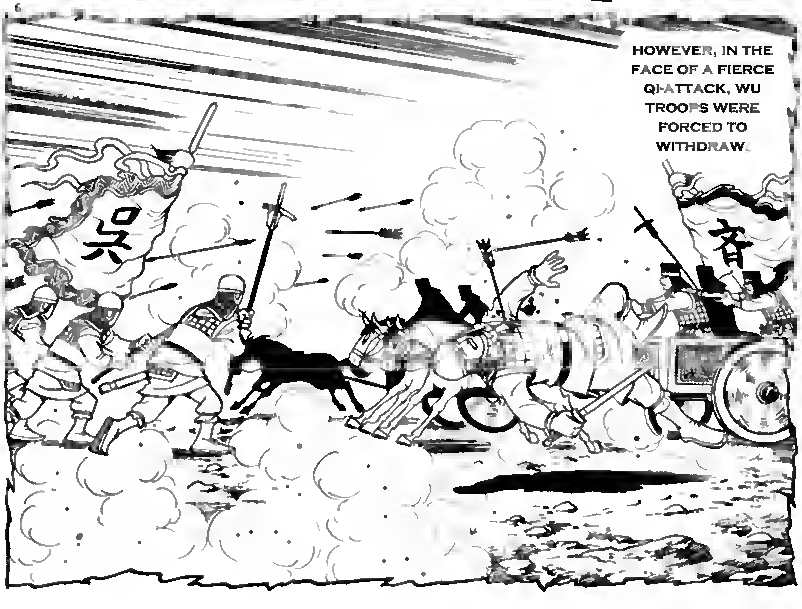
3


YES, SIR.
IT'S BEEN 3 YEARS SINCE WU ZIXU DIED. THERE IS NO LONGER ANY STATESMAN OF NOTE IN WU.


NO, NOT YET, YOUR HIGHNESS.
SO IS THE TIME NOW RIPE FOR AN ATTACK?
BUT I HEARD WU RECENTLY LOST ITS ELITE TROOPS TO A QI-COUNTERATTACK
SOON AFTER WU ZIXU'S DEATH, THE MAN HE ENTRUSTED HIS SON TO IN QI, BAO MU, CONSPIRED IN A COUP TO OVERTHROW THE DUKE OF QI.

RELATIONS BETWEEN DUKE DAO OF QI AND BAO MU WERE STRAINED AND BAO MU, FEARING BEING PUT TO DEATH, DECIDED TO STRIKE FIRST BY KILLING THE DUKE.
5
A RETAINER HAS KILLED HIS LORD IN QI! HOW CAN I IGNORE THIS IF I ASPIRE TO BE HEGEMON OF THE REALM? I WILL THUS REDRESS THIS GROSS INJUSTICE BY FORCE OF ARMS!


THUS, KING FUCHAI LED AN ARMY TO QI OUT OF HIS MORAL SENSE OF DUTY.


HOWEVER, IN THE FACE OF A FIERCE QI-ATTACK, WU TROOPS WERE FORCED TO WITHDRAW.
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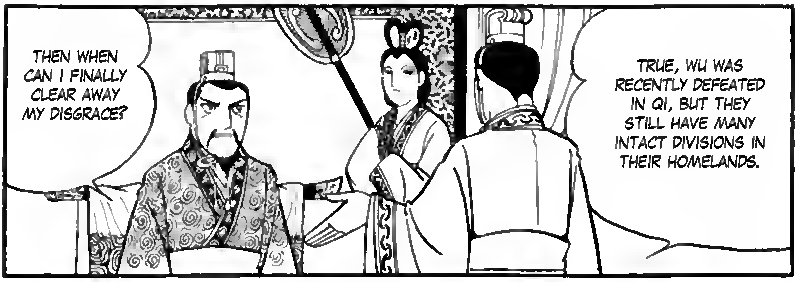

THEN WHEN CAN I FINALLY CLEAR AWAY MY DISGRACE?
TRUE, WU WAS RECENTLY DEFEATED IN QI, BUT THEY STILL HAVE MANY INTACT DIVISIONS IN THEIR HOMELANDS.

EXPLAIN FURTHER.

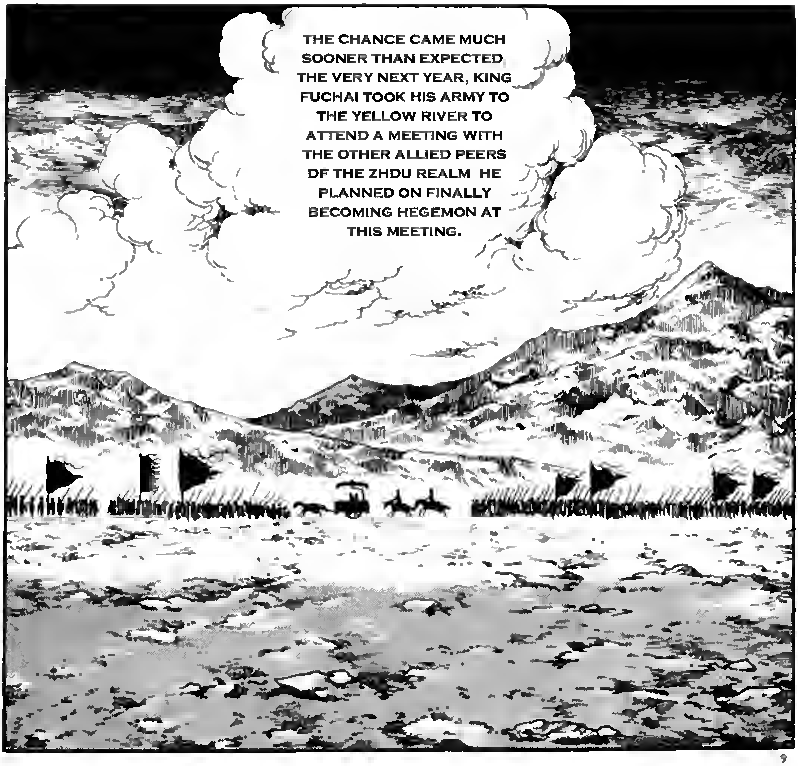
DO NOT HURRY, YOUR HIGHNESS YOUR CHANCE WILL COME IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

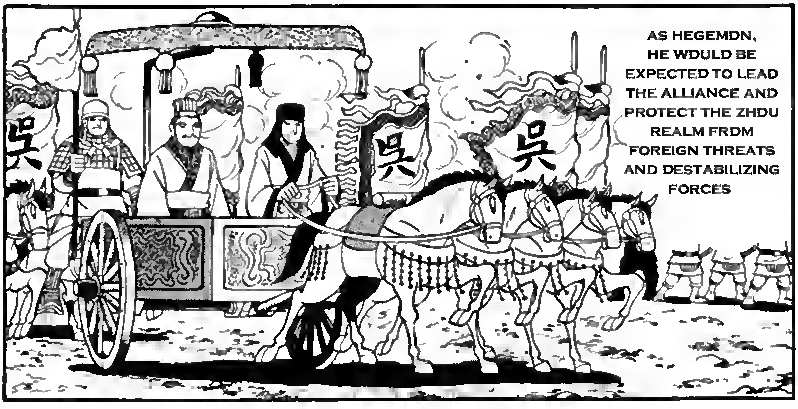
WU ZIXU'S DYING WORDS WERE, "LET US SEE WHAT THE KING CAN DO WITHOUT ME!" AS SUCH, KING FUCHAI HAS BECOME EVEN MORE IMPATIENT AND EAGER TO BECOME HEGEMON AND PROVE HIMSELF.

7

HM...
WITH HIS CORRUPT CHANCELLOR BO PEI MORE CONCERNED WITH TAKING BRIBES THAN TAKING CARE OF WU, AND KING FUCHAI CONTINUING TO WASTE MEN AND MONEY IN HIS VAIN ATTEMPT FOR HEGEMONY, WU'S STRENGTH WILL QUICKLY BE SAPPED.

ALL WE HAVE TO DO NOW IS WAIT FOR THE IDEAL CHANCE TO STRIKE WHILE NOT ATTRACTING ANY SUSPICIONS FROM WU.
AN ATTACK WHILE THE RULER LEAVES HIS KINGDOM?
THIS IDEAL CHANCE WILL BE WHEN KING FUCHAI LEADS ANOTHER WAR FAR FROM WU.
8
VERY WELL.
YES. I ADVISE SIMPLY TRAINING THE TROOPS AND STOCKPILING GRAIN UNTIL THEN.


THE CHANCE CAME MUCH SOONER THAN EXPECTED. THE VERY NEXT YEAR, KING FUCHAI TOOK HIS ARMY TO THE YELLOW RIVER TO ATTEND A MEETING WITH THE OTHER ALLIED PEERS OF THE ZHDU REALM. HE PLANNED ON FINALLY BECOMING HEGEMON AT THIS MEETING.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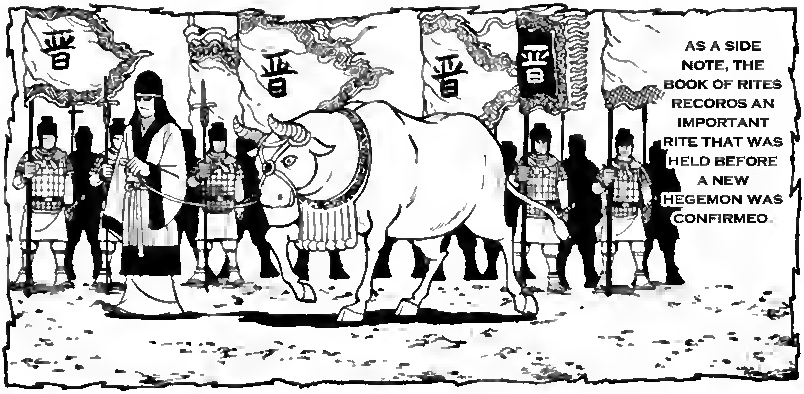
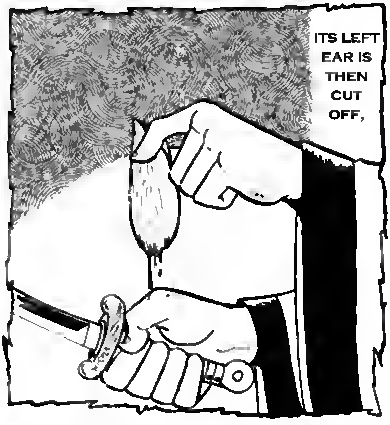
AS HEGEMDN, HE WDULD BE EXPECTED TO LEAD THE ALLIANCE AND PROTECT THE ZHDU REALM FRDM FOREIGN THREATS AND DESTABILIZING FORCES


AS A SIDE NOTE, THE BOOK OF RITES RECOROS AN IMPORTANT RITE THAT WAS HELD BEFORE A NEW HEGEMON WAS CONFIRMEO.

FIRST, A COW IS OFFEREO AS A SACRIFICE.

10

AND PLACED IN A BOWL.


ITS LEFT EAR IS THEN CUT OFF,

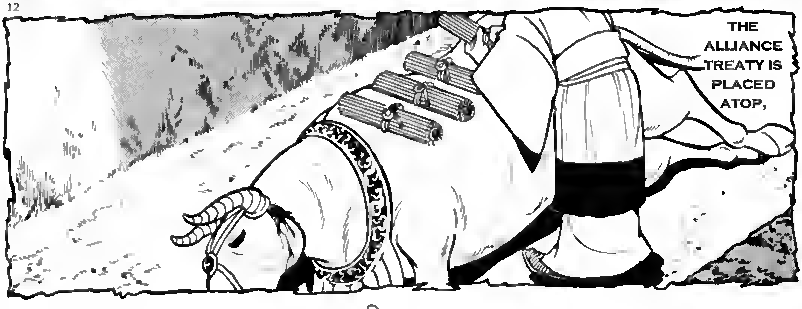
IT IS WITH THE COW'S BLOOD THAT THE PEERS OF THE REALM SIGN ONTO THE ALLIANCE.

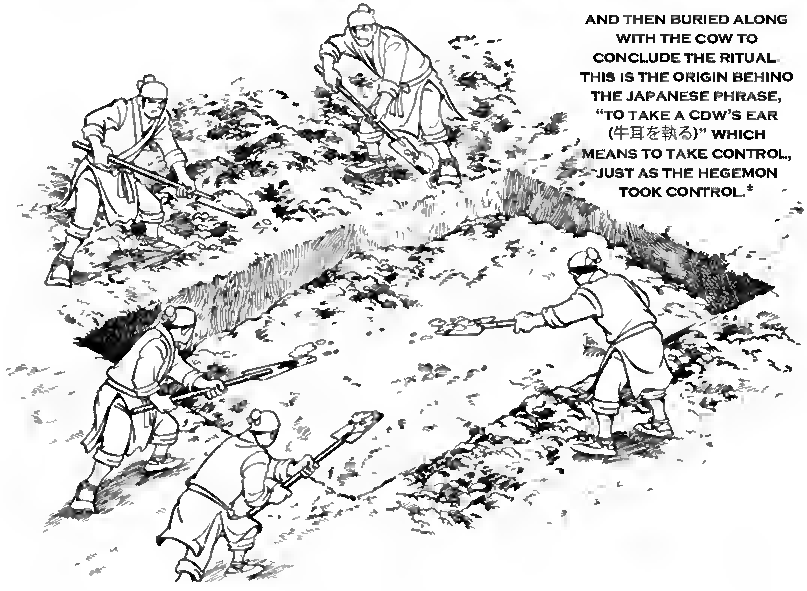
AND READS THE ALLIANCE TREATY.

THE HEW HEGEMON THEN SIPS THE COW'S BLOOD,

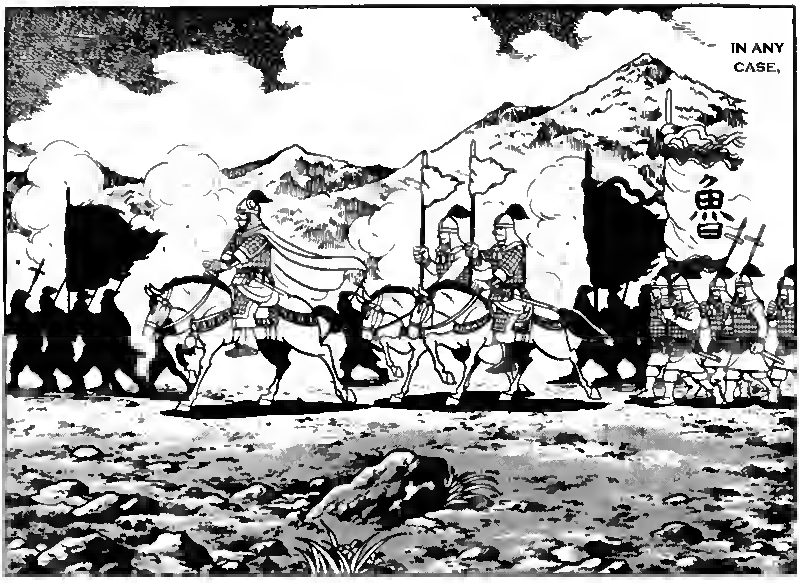
THE SACRIFICED COW IS THEN PLACED IN A RECTANGULAR HOLE.

12

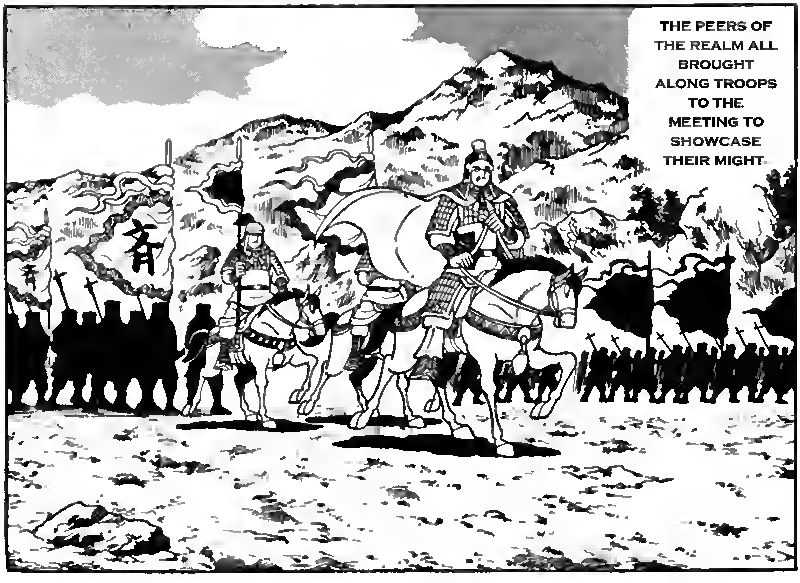


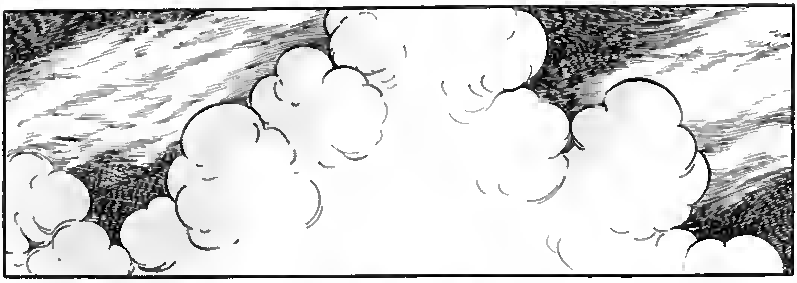

AND THEN BURIED ALONG WITH THE COW TO CONCLUDE THE RITUAL. THIS IS THE ORIGIN BEHIND THE JAPANESE PHRASE, "TO TAKE A COW'S EAR (牛耳を執る)" WHICH MEANS TO TAKE CONTROL, JUST AS THE HEGEMON TOOK CONTROL.*

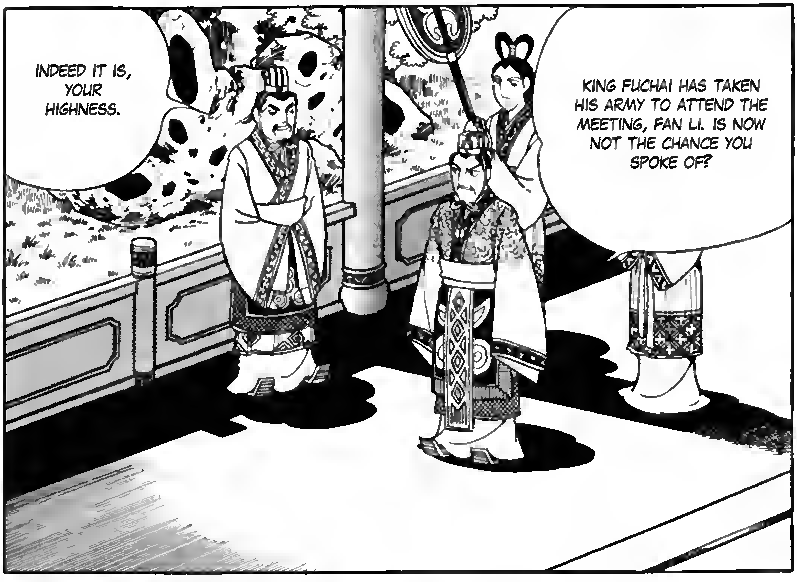
*THE PHRASE IS COMMONLY USED IN ITS SHORTENED FORM, 牛耳る.


IN ANY CASE,

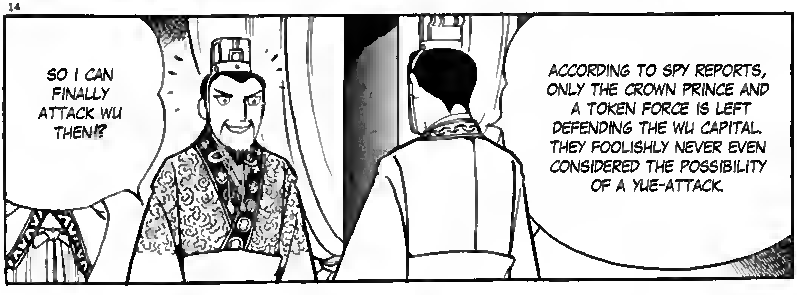
13


THE PEERS OF THE REALM ALL BROUGHT ALONG TROOPS TO THE MEETING TO SHOWCASE THEIR MIGHT.




KING FUCHAI HAS TAKEN HIS ARMY TO ATTEND THE MEETING, FAN LI. IS NOW NOT THE CHANCE YOU SPOKE OF?
INDEED IT IS, YOUR HIGHNESS.

14

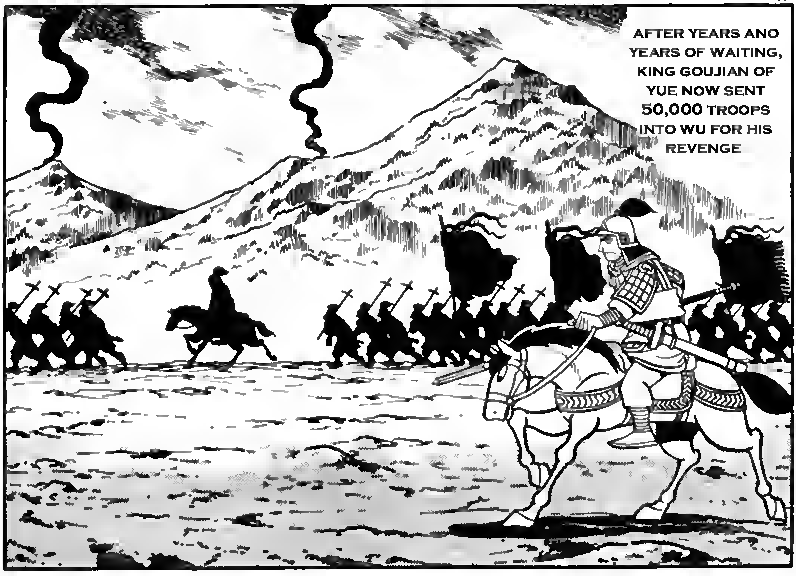

ACCORDING TO SPY REPORTS, ONLY THE CROWN PRINCE AND A TOKEN FORCE IS LEFT DEFENDING THE WU CAPITAL. THEY FOOLISHLY NEVER EVEN CONSIDERED THE POSSIBILITY OF A YUE-ATTACK.
SO I CAN FINALLY ATTACK WU THEN!?

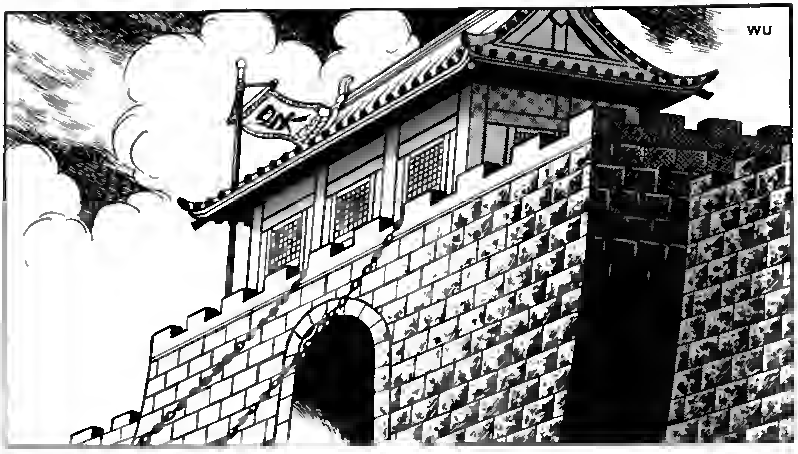
OHHH!
YES, PLEASE MAKE THE BEST USE OF THIS CHANCE AND CLEAR YOUR DISGRACE, YOUR HIGHNESS.

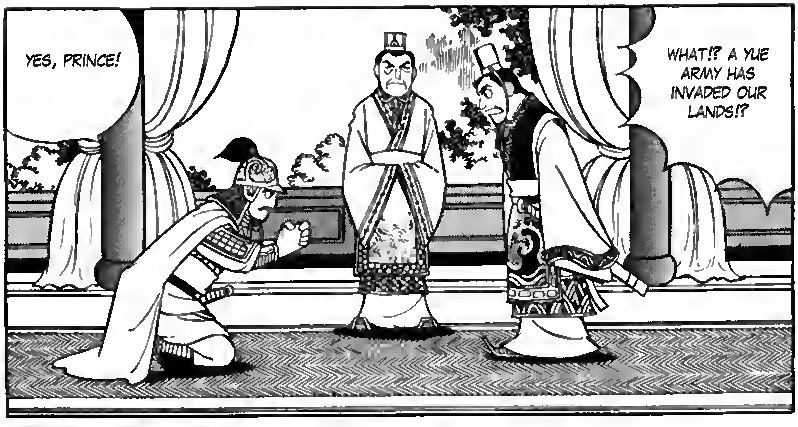
YES, SIR!

SEND THE ORDER TO MOBILIZE THE TROOPS AT ONCE!

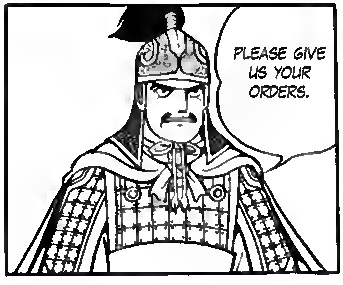
15


AFTER YEARS AND YEARS OF WAITING, KING GOUJIAN OF YUE NOW SENT 50,000 TROOPS INTO WU FOR HIS REVENGE

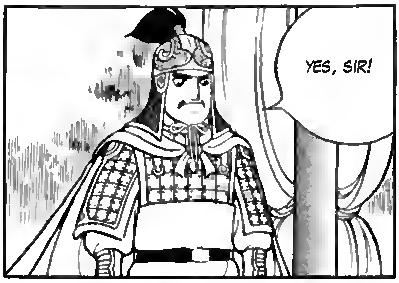

WU


YES, PRINCE!
WHAT!? A YUE ARMY HAS INVADED OUR LANDS!?

16

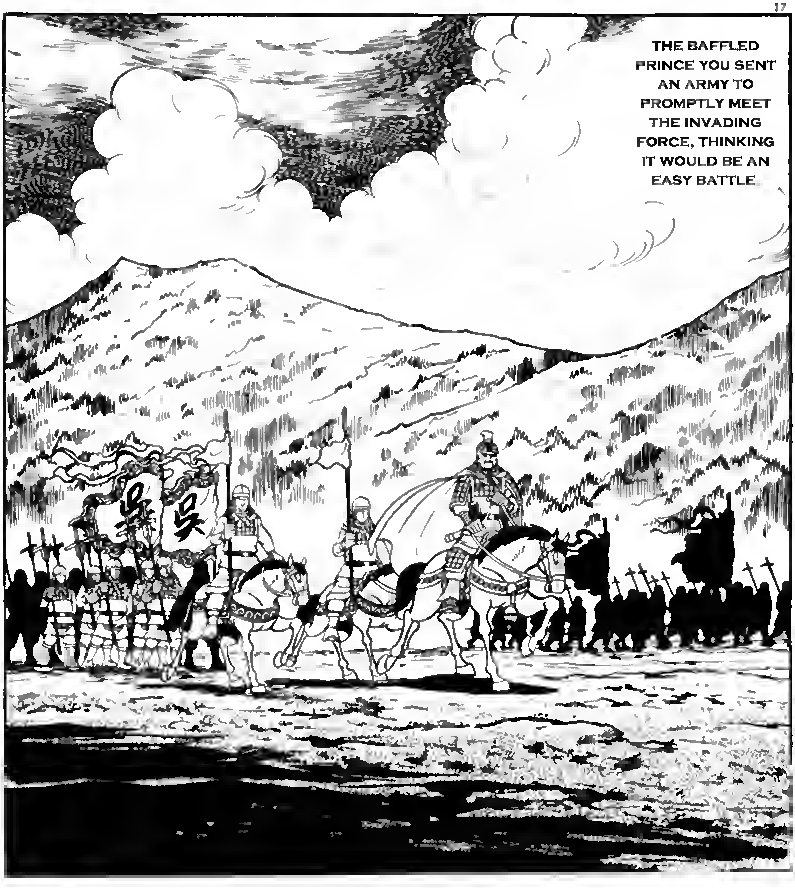

PLEASE GIVE US YOUR ORDERS.

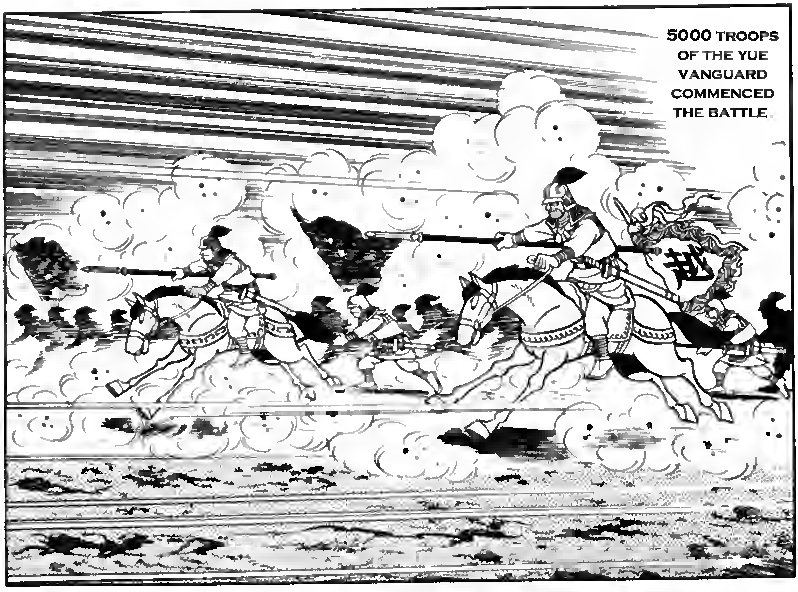
HAS GOUJIAN LOST HIS MIND!? HOW CAN A MINOR STATE LIKE YUE EVEN THINK OF ATTACKING WU!? THEY ARE MERE ANTS BEFORE THE ELEPHANT THAT IS US!


YES, SIR!

SEND THE TROOPS OUT! WE WILL MEET THEM HEAD-ON!

17


THE BAFFLED PRINCE YOU SENT AN ARMY TO PROMPTLY MEET THE INVADING FORCE, THINKING IT WOULD BE AN EASY BATTLE.

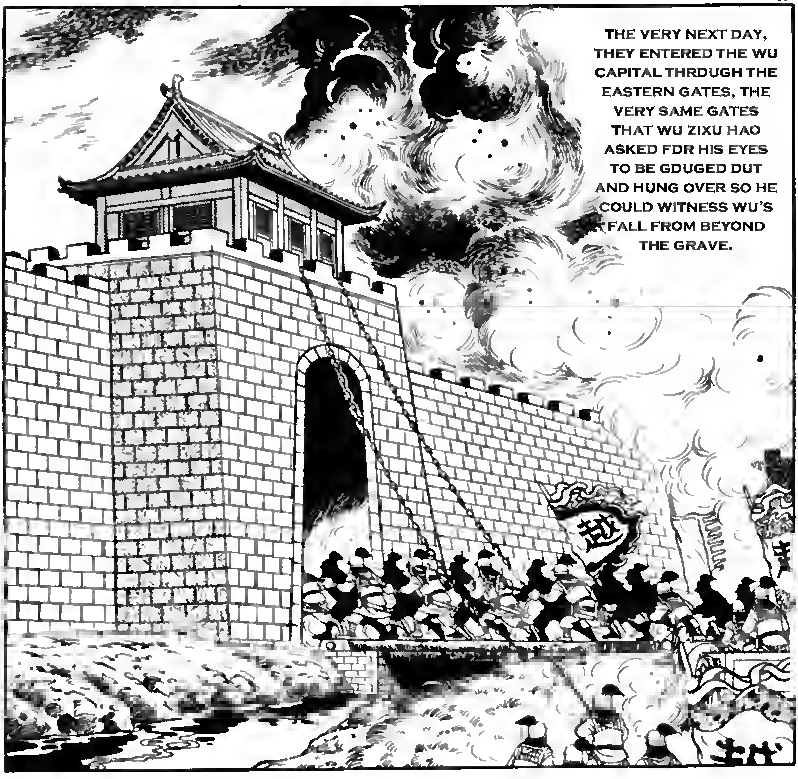

5000 TROOPS
OF THE YUE
VANGUARD
COMMENCED
THE BATTLE

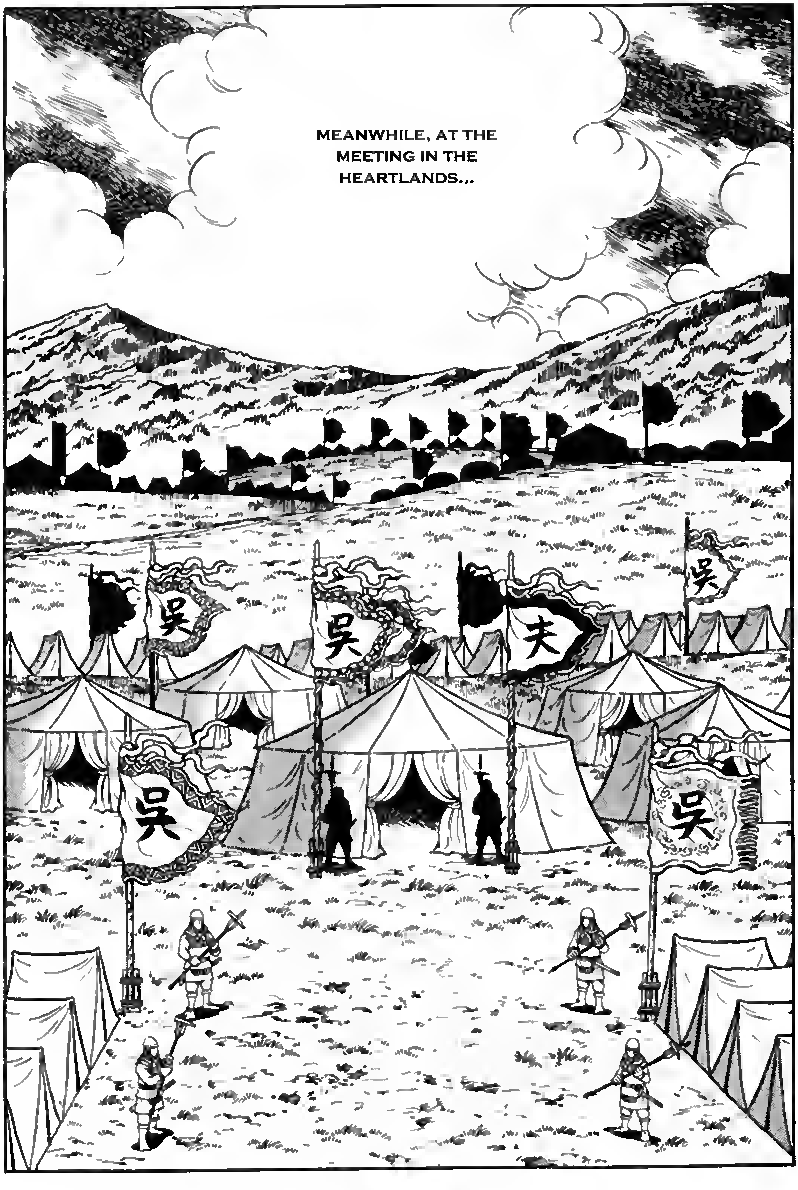
18

THE YEARS OF
DILIGENT TRAINING
AND DRILLING
SHOWED ITS
EFFECT AT ONCE

THEY CAPUTRED PRINCE YOU AND ANN-HILATED HIS ARMY.

19


THE VERY NEXT DAY, THEY ENTERED THE WU CAPITAL THRDUGH THE EASTERN GATES, THE VERY SAME GATES THAT WU ZIXU HAO ASKED FDR HIS EYES TO BE GDUGED DUT AND HUNG OVER SO HE COULD WITNESS WU'S FALL FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE.


MEANWHILE, AT THE MEETING IN THE HEARTLANDS...
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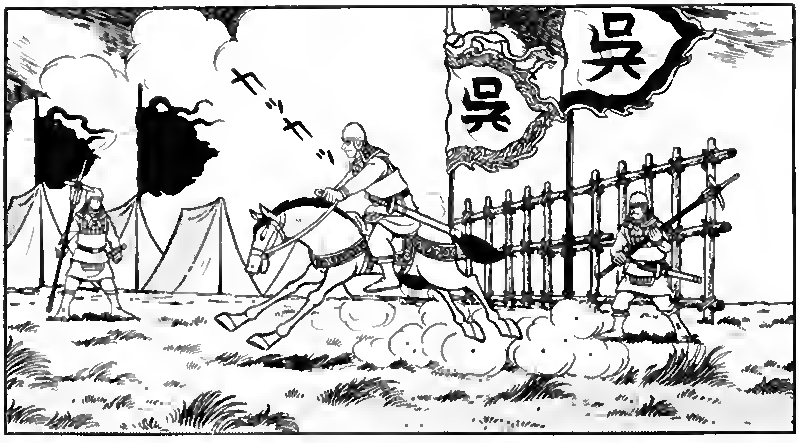

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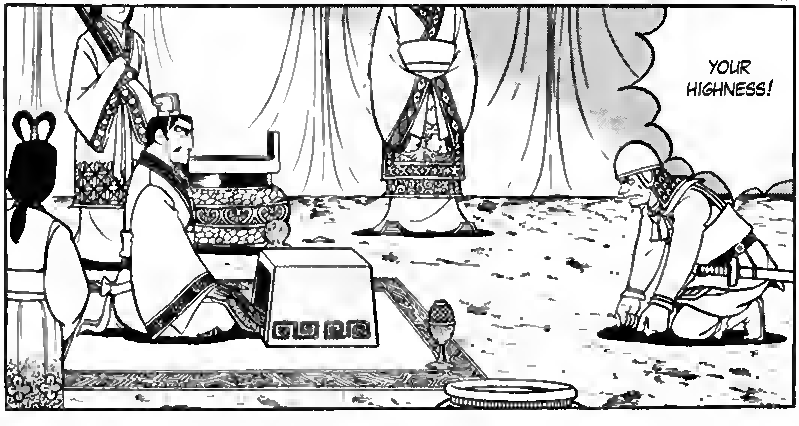
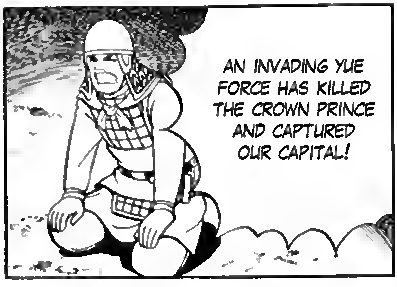
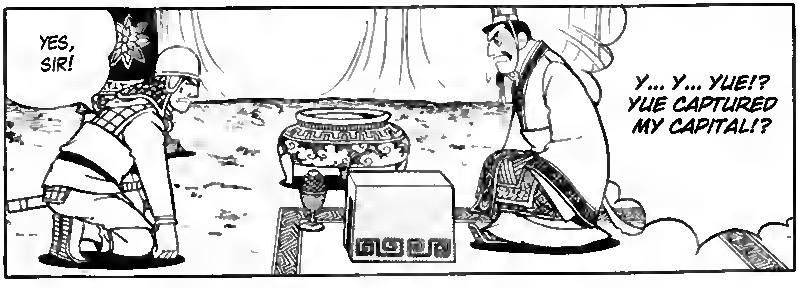


WHAT!?

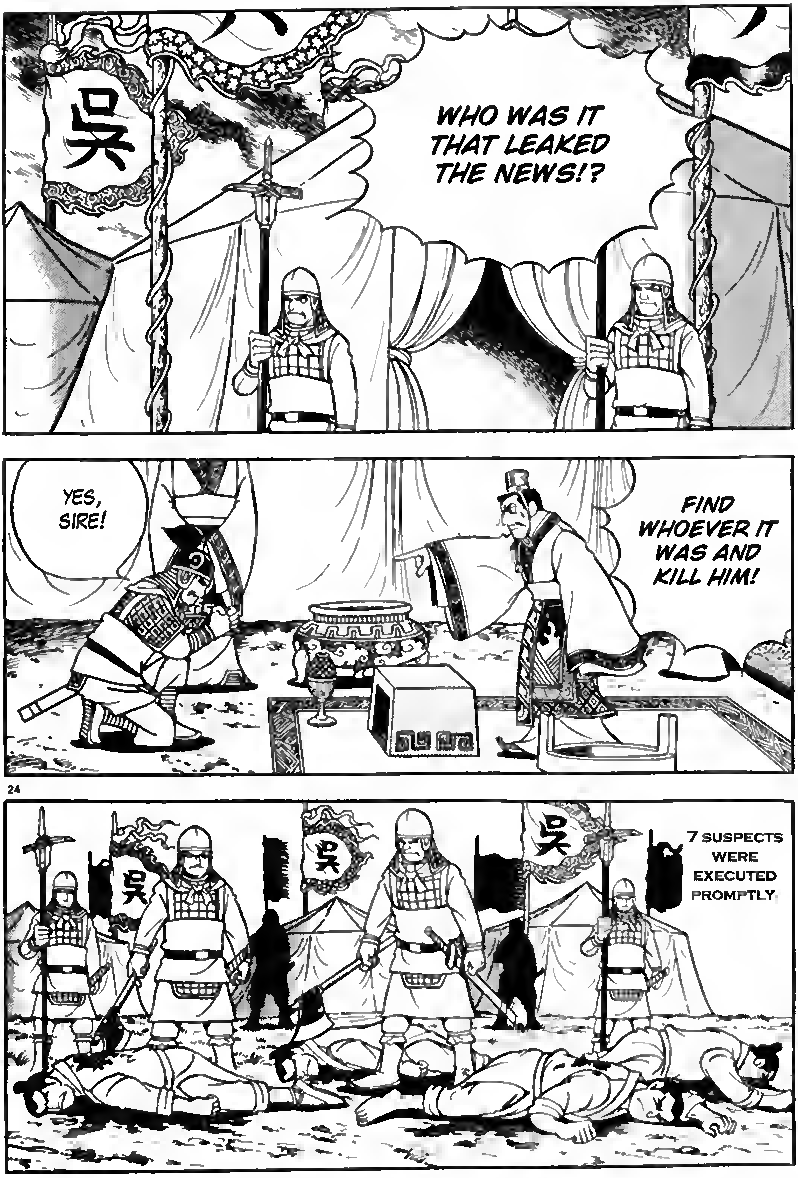

AN INVADING YUE FORCE HAS KILLED THE CROWN PRINCE AND CAPTURED OUR CAPITAL!


YES, SIR!
Y... Y... YUE!? YUE CAPTURED MY CAPITAL!?

THE MEETING IS ABOUT TO BEGIN! I CANNOT WITHDRAW NOW AND RUIN MY ENTIRE PLANS!

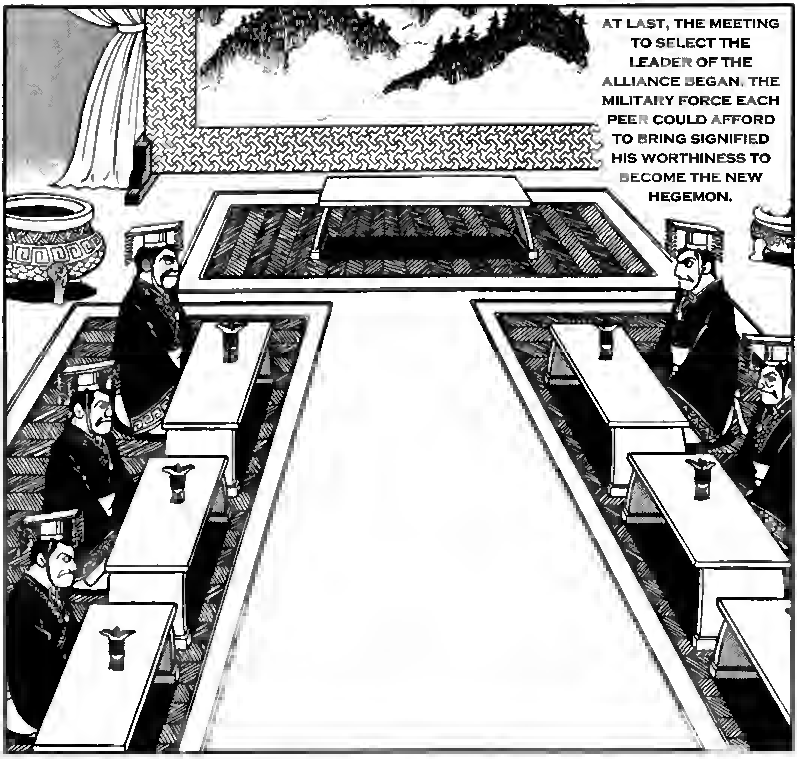
CALM DOWN!
WE MUST RETURN TO WU AT ONCE, YOUR HIGHNESS!

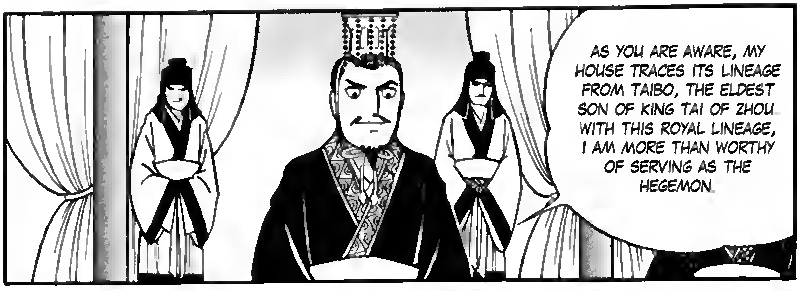
YES, SIR!
MAKE SURE NONE OF THE OTHER DUKES FIND OUT! IF THEY DO, THEY'LL NEVER CONFIRM ME AS HEGEMON! ANYONE WHO VIOLATES THIS ORDER WILL BE EXECUTED!
I CAN DESTROY THAT INSIGNIFICANT YUE ANY TIME! BUT FIRST, I'LL BECOME THE HEGEMON!
HOWEVER, AN EVENT OF THIS MAGNITUDE WAS TOO DIFFICULT TO KEEP UNDER WRAPS. THE OTHER DUKES HAD THEIR OWN SOURCES WHICH NOTIFIED THEM.
23
A HEGEMON WAS NORMALLY PAID ANNUAL TRIBUTE BY ALLIED PEERS FOR MINOR STATES. THIS TRIBUTE COULD PLACE A HARSH ECONOMIC BURDEN.
IT WOULD BE A WASTE OF THE TRIBUTE WE PAY!
IF HE CANNOT EVEN PROTECT HIS OWN LANDS, HOW CAN WE EXPECT HIM TO PROTECT US FROM FOREIGN THREATS?

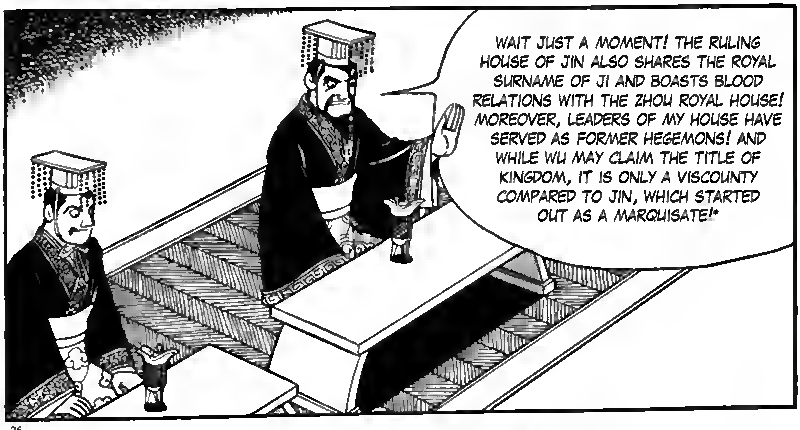

吳
WHO WAS IT THAT LEAKED THE NEWS!?
YES, SIRE!
FIND WHOEVER IT WAS AND KILL HIM!
24
吳
吳
吳
7 SUSPECTS WERE EXECUTED PROMPTLY.

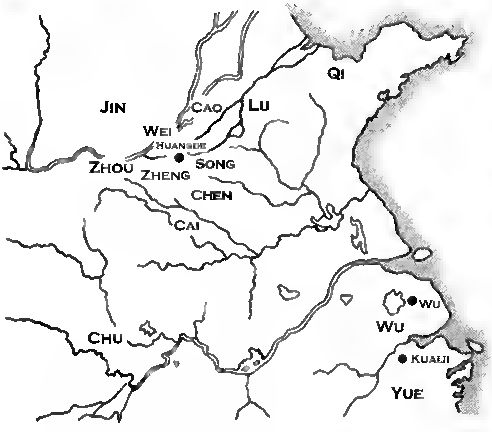
7TH MONTH,
HUANGDE

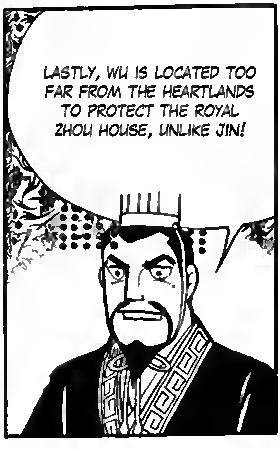
25


AT LAST, THE MEETING TO SELECT THE LEADER OF THE ALLIANCE BEGAN. THE MILITARY FORCE EACH PEER COULD AFFORD TO BRING SIGNIFIED HIS WORTHINESS TO BECOME THE NEW HEGEMON.


AS YOU ARE AWARE, MY HOUSE TRACES ITS LINEAGE FROM TAIBO, THE ELDEST SON OF KING TAI OF ZHOU. WITH THIS ROYAL LINEAGE, I AM MORE THAN WORTHY OF SERVING AS THE HEGEMON.

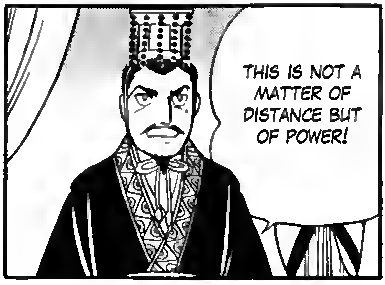

WAIT JUST A MOMENT! THE RULING HOUSE OF JIN ALSO SHARES THE ROYAL SURNAME OF JI AND BOASTS BLOOD RELATIONS WITH THE ZHOU ROYAL HOUSE! MOREOVER, LEADERS OF MY HOUSE HAVE SERVED AS FORMER HEGEMONS! AND WHILE WU MAY CLAIM THE TITLE OF KINGDOM, IT IS ONLY A VISCOUNTY COMPARED TO JIN, WHICH STARTED OUT AS A MARQUISATE!*





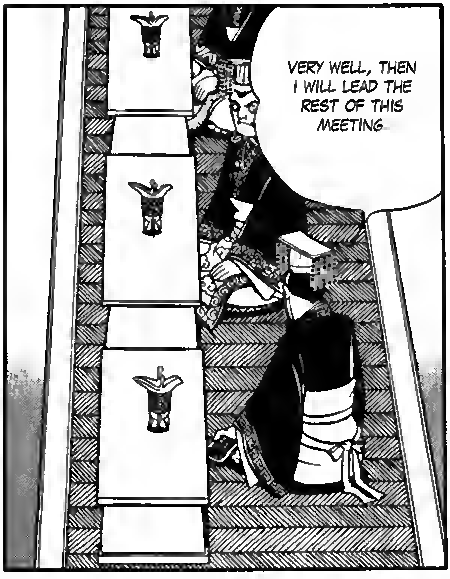
*THE RANKING ORDER OF NOBILITY AT THIS TIME WENT THUS DUKE (公) > MARQUIS (侯) > COUNT (伯) > VISCOUNT (子) > BARON (男)

OH? IF YOU FEEL THAT JIN'S MIGHT IS SO MUCH INFERIOR, YOU ARE WELCOME TO TEST IT OUT!


THIS IS NOT A MATTER OF DISTANCE BUT OF POWER!

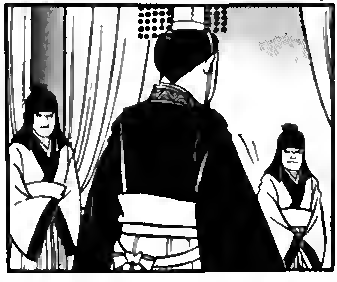
PLEASE CALM DOWN, YOUR HIGHNESS. THINK OF OUR CURRENT DOMESTIC SITUATION...

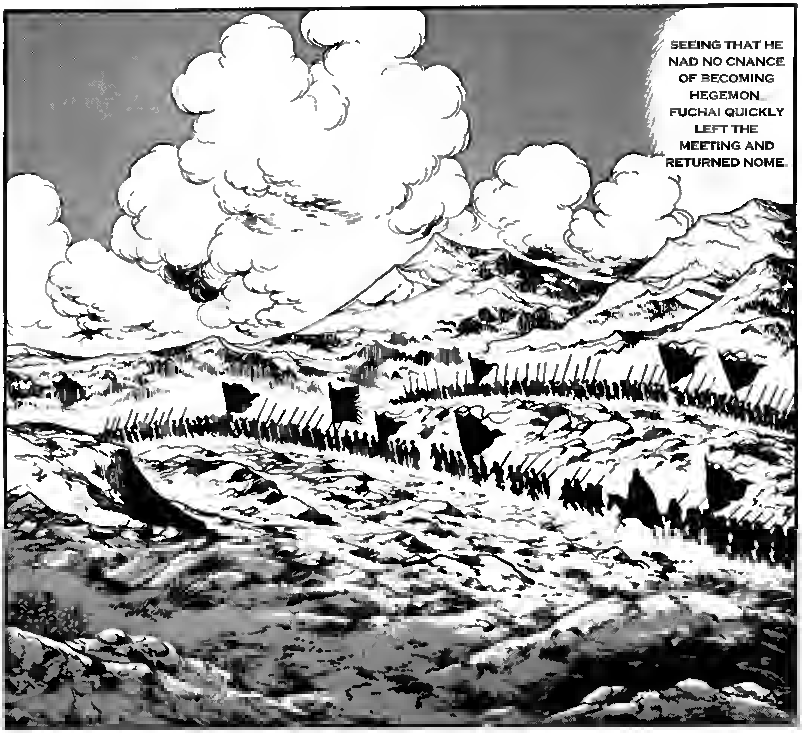
AS YOU WISH!

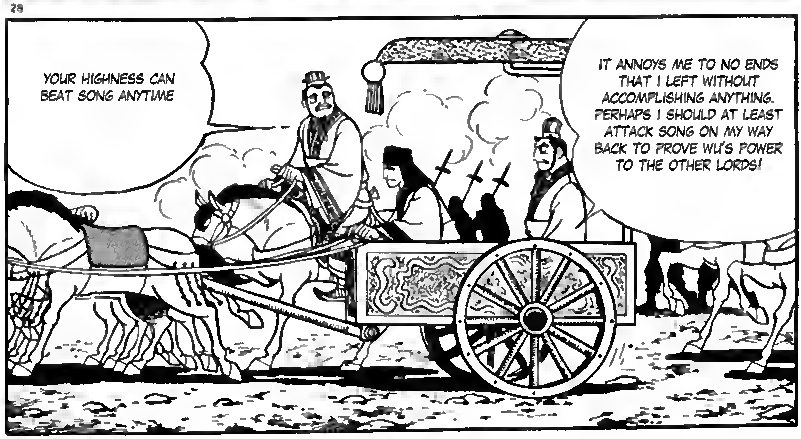

VERY WELL, THEN I WILL LEAD THE REST OF THIS MEETING.

I WILL TAKE MY LEAVE!

27




SEEING THAT HE HAD NO CHANCE OF BECOMING HEGEMON, FUCHAI QUICKLY LEFT THE MEETING AND RETURNED HOME.


YOUR HIGHNESS CAN BEAT SONG ANYTIME
IT ANNOYS ME TO NO ENDS THAT I LEFT WITHOUT ACCOMPLISHING ANYTHING. PERHAPS I SHOULD AT LEAST ATTACK SONG ON MY WAY BACK TO PROVE WU'S POWER TO THE OTHER LORDS!

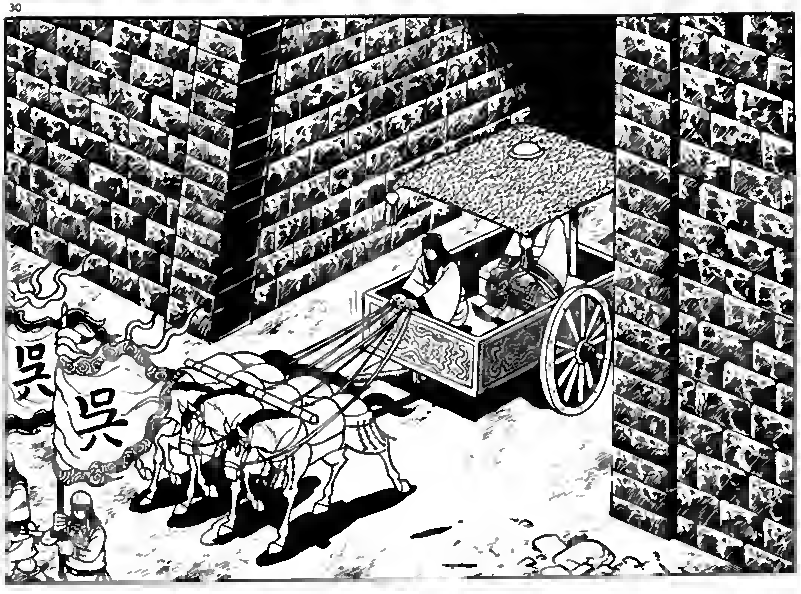
YES, I SUPPOSE YOU'RE RIGHT, BO PEI

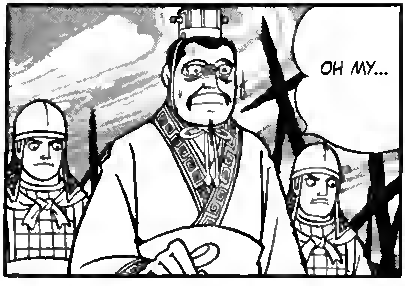
BUT WITH THE SUMMER HEAT AND THE YUE ATTACK, IT WOULD BE BEST TO RETURN QUICKLY WITHOUT WASTING TIME ELSEWHERE.

29

HEEDING BO PEI'S ADVICE, FUCHAI RUSHED BACK HOME WITHOUT FURTHER THOUGHT OF ATTACKING SONG.

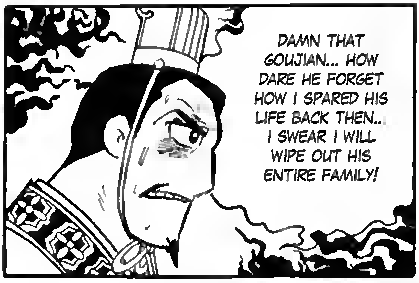
30

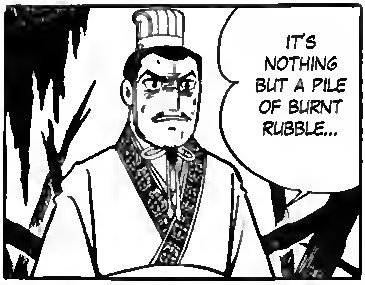




31

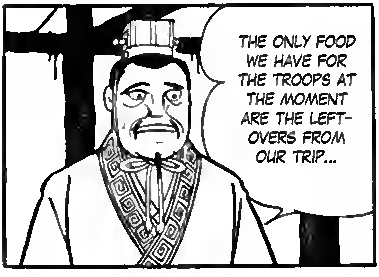
32


DAMN THAT GOUJIAN... HOW DARE HE FORGET HOW I SPARED HIS LIFE BACK THEN.. I SWEAR I WILL WIPE OUT HIS ENTIRE FAMILY!


IT'S NOTHING BUT A PILE OF BURNT RUBBLE...

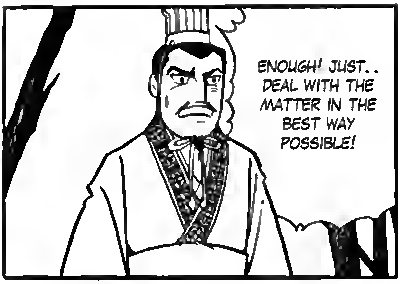
BO PEI! WE WILL ATTACK YUE AT ONCE!

33

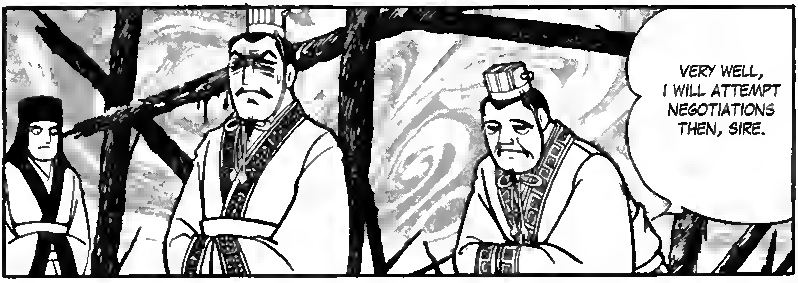

THE ONLY FOOD WE HAVE FOR THE TROOPS AT THE MOMENT ARE THE LEFT-OVERS FROM OUR TRIP...

WHAT!?
I'M AFRAID THAT'S NOT POSSIBLE, YOUR HIGHNESS.

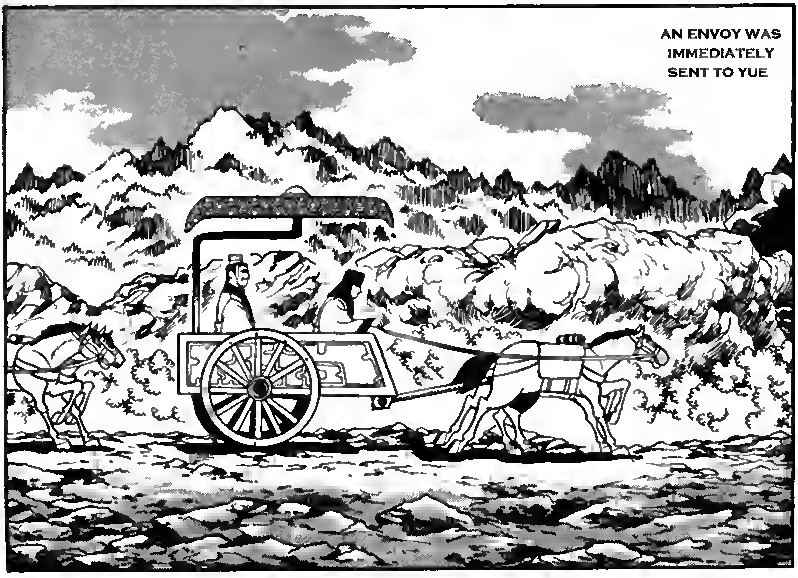
WE MUST THINK ABOUT BATTLING HUNGER NOW MORE THAN BATTLING YUE.
THE YUE SEEMS TO HAVE RANSACKED ALL OUR STORES OF GRAIN AND TREASURE UPON HEARING OUR RETURN.
NEGOTI-ATE!?
WE CAN ONLY NEGOTIATE PEACE, SIRE.
THEN WHAT DO YOU SUGGEST I DO ABOUT YUE!?
34
WITH THE ONGOING SUMMER HEAT AND LACK OF FOOD, WAR IS SIMPLY NOT A VIABLE OPTION, YOUR HIGHNESS.
THE GREAT KINGDOM OF WU IS TO BEG FOR PEACE NEGOTIATIONS WITH THAT PETTY, INSIGNIFICANT YUE!?

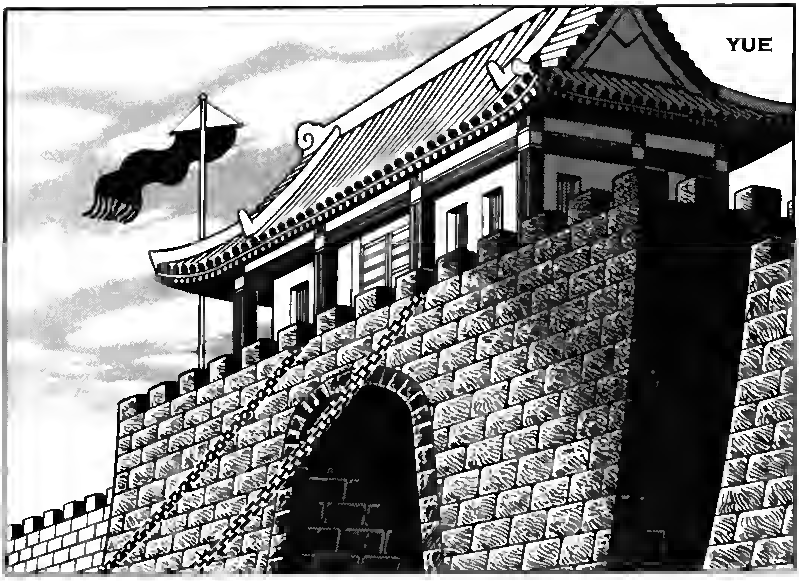

ENOUGH! JUST.. DEAL WITH THE MATTER IN THE BEST WAY POSSIBLE!

IF WE DO NOT SUE FOR PEACE NOW, THEN WE CANNOT HOPE TO REBUILD THE CAPITAL AS YUE CAN COME AND ATTACK ANYTIME.

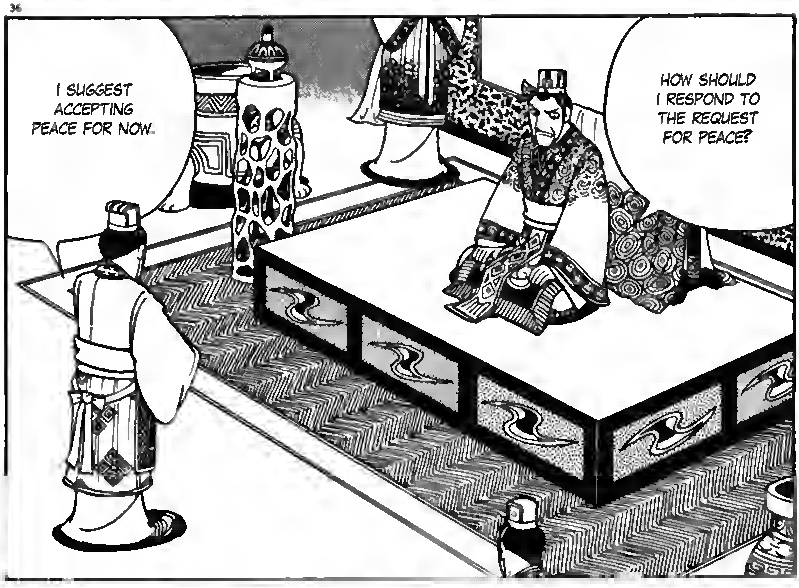

VERY WELL, I WILL ATTEMPT NEGOTIATIONS THEN, SIRE.

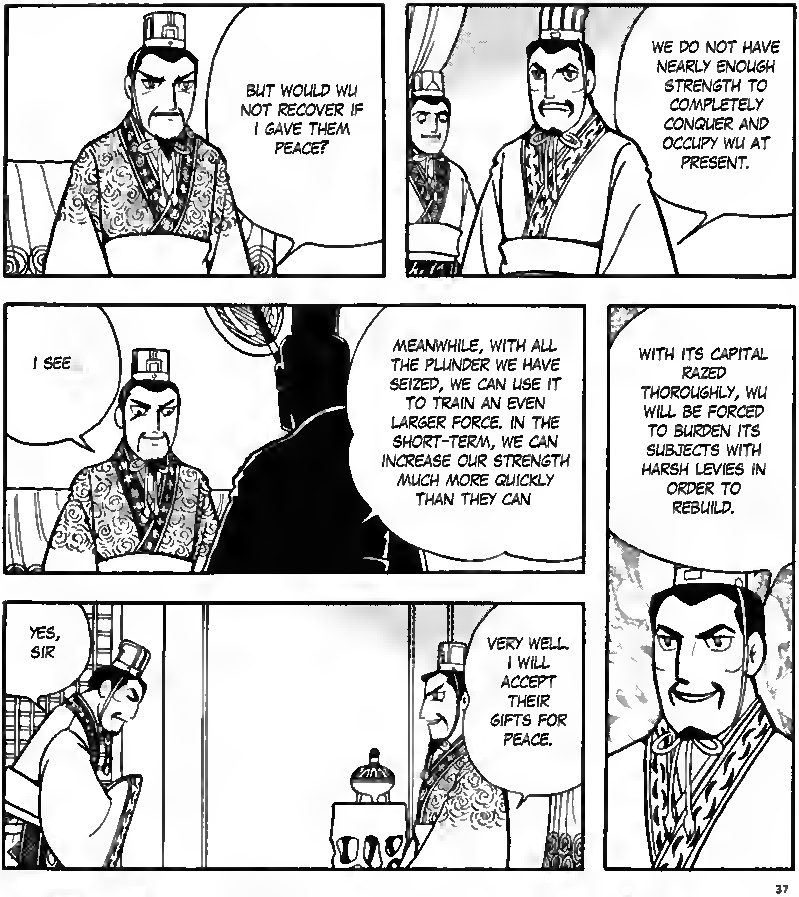
35


AN ENVOY WAS IMMEDIATELY SENT TO YUE

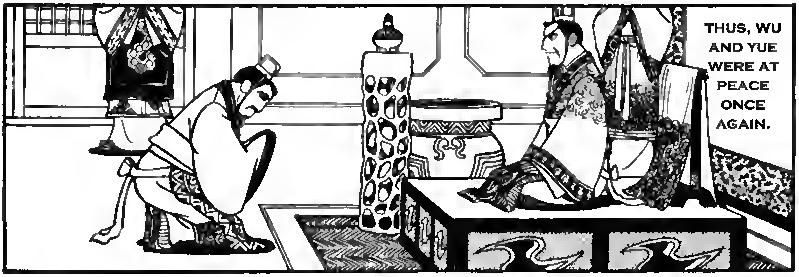

YUE

36


I SUGGEST ACCEPTING PEACE FOR NOW.
HOW SHOULD I RESPOND TO THE REQUEST FOR PEACE?

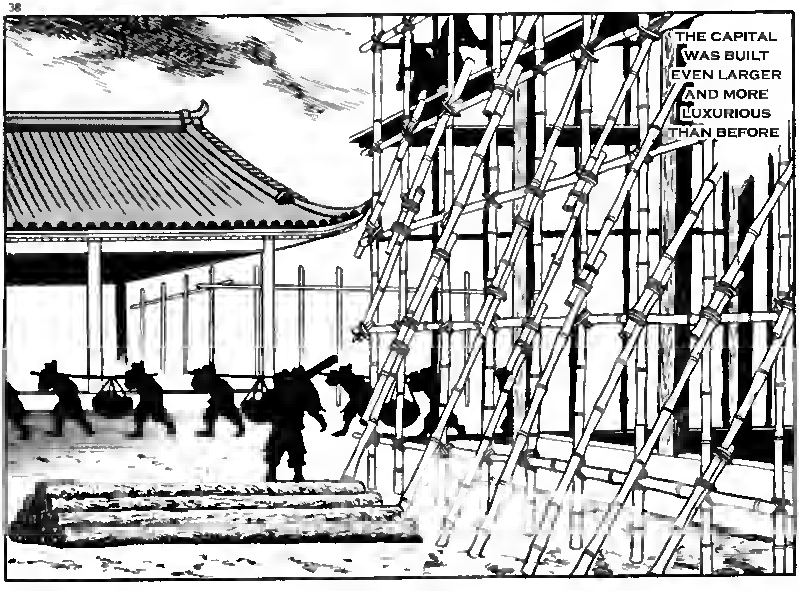

BUT WOULD WU NOT RECOVER IF I GAVE THEM PEACE?
WE DO NOT HAVE NEARLY ENOUGH STRENGTH TO COMPLETELY CONQUER AND OCCUPY WU AT PRESENT.
I SEE
MEANWHILE, WITH ALL THE PLUNDER WE HAVE SEIZED, WE CAN USE IT TO TRAIN AN EVEN LARGER FORCE. IN THE SHORT-TERM, WE CAN INCREASE OUR STRENGTH MUCH MORE QUICKLY THAN THEY CAN
WITH ITS CAPITAL RAZED THOROUGHLY, WU WILL BE FORCED TO BURDEN ITS SUBJECTS WITH HARSH LEVIES IN ORDER TO REBUILD.
YES, SIR
VERY WELL. I WILL ACCEPT THEIR GIFTS FOR PEACE.

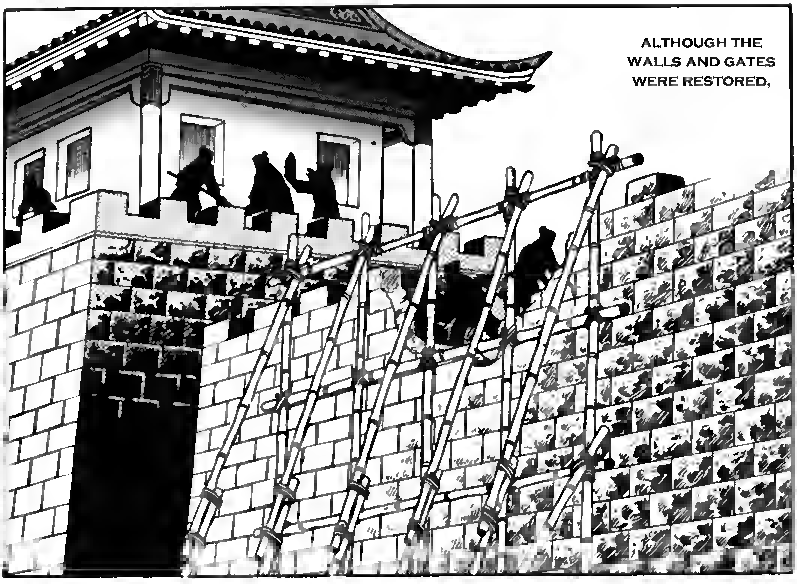
37


THUS, WU AND YUE WERE AT PEACE ONCE AGAIN.

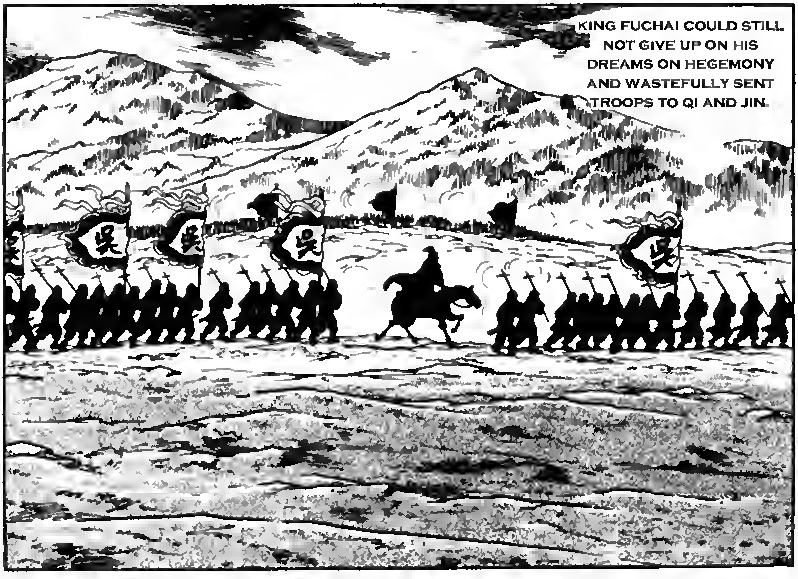
LABOUR WAS LEVIED FOR THE WU PEASANTS TO REBUILD THE CAPITAL

38


THE CAPITAL WAS BUILT EVEN LARGER AND MORE LUXURIOUS THAN BEFORE


ALTHOUGH THE WALLS AND GATES WERE RESTORED,

39


KING FUCHAI COULD STILL NOT GIVE UP ON HIS DREAMS ON HEGEMONY AND WASTEFULLY SENT TROOPS TO QI AND JIN.
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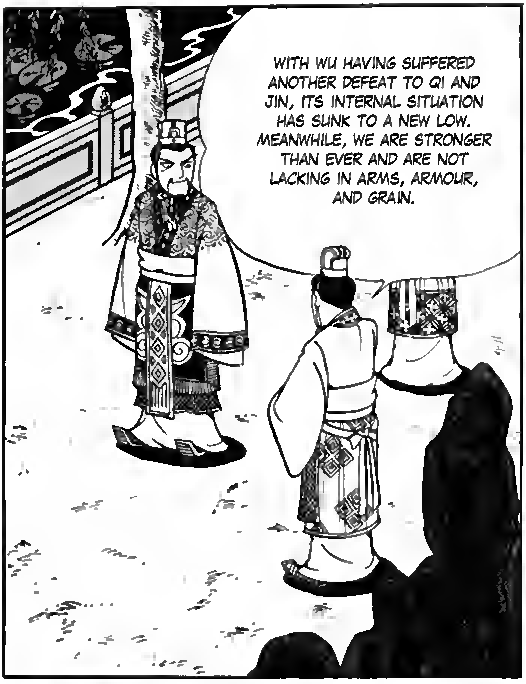
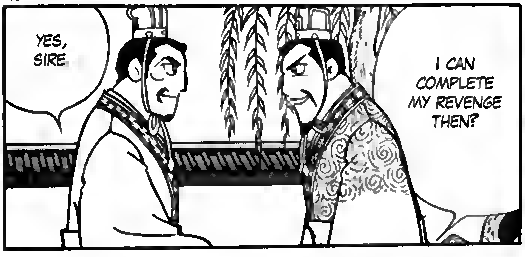

WITH WU HAVING SUFFERED ANOTHER DEFEAT TO QI AND JIN, ITS INTERNAL SITUATION HAS SUNK TO A NEW LOW. MEANWHILE, WE ARE STRONGER THAN EVER AND ARE NOT LACKING IN ARMS, ARMOUR, AND GRAIN.

4 YEARS LATER...

NOW IS THE TIME TO DELIVER THE FINISHING BLOW AT LAST.

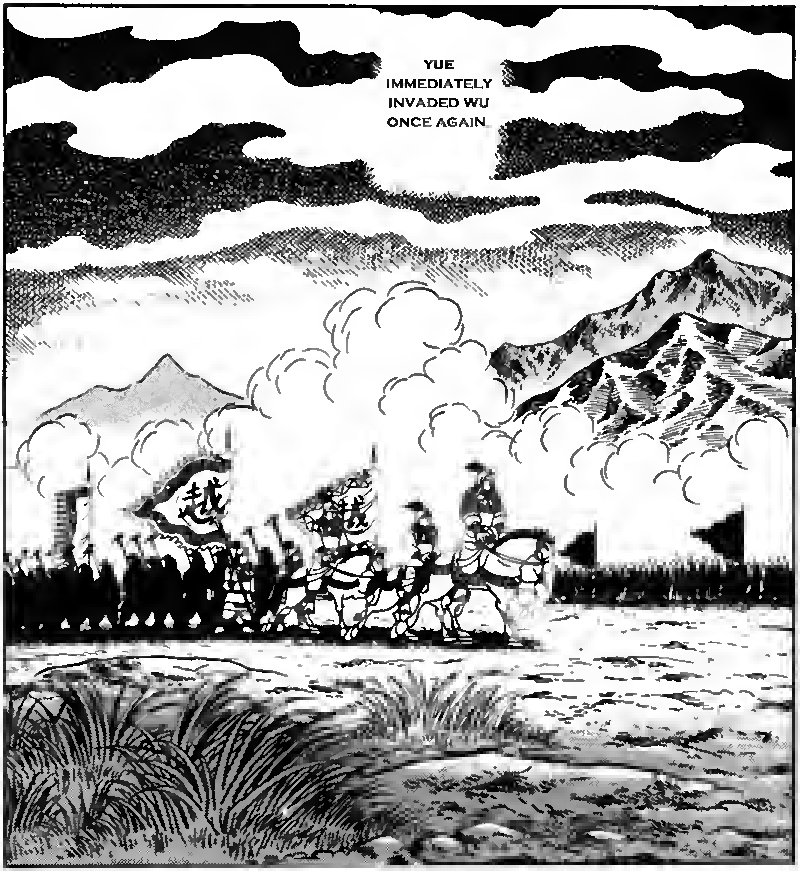
40

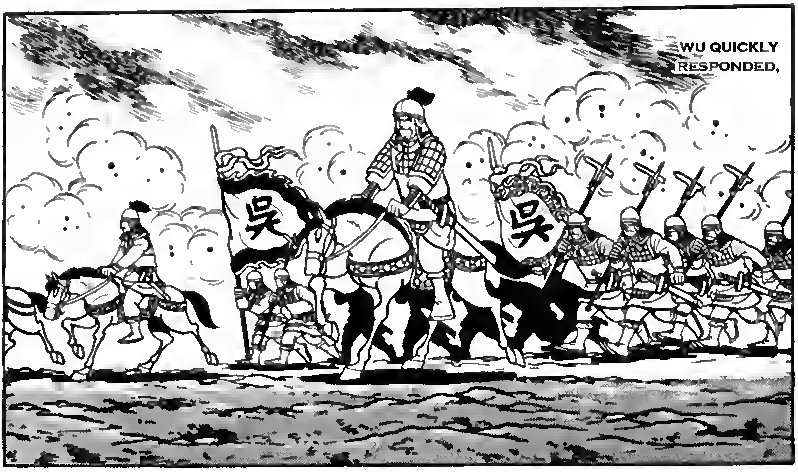

YES, SIRE.
I CAN COMPLETE MY REVENGE THEN?

42

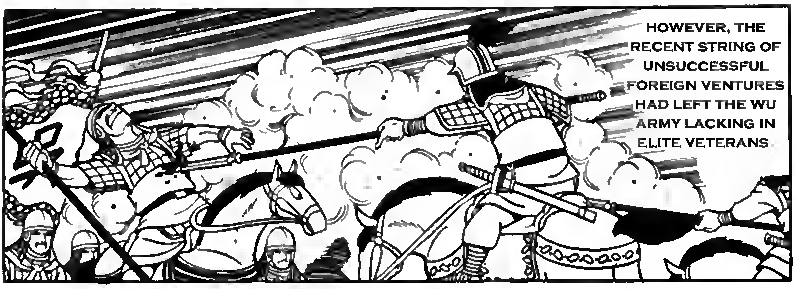
YES, SIRE!
GOOD, THEN WAR IT IS!

41


YUE IMMEDIATELY INVADED WU ONCE AGAIN

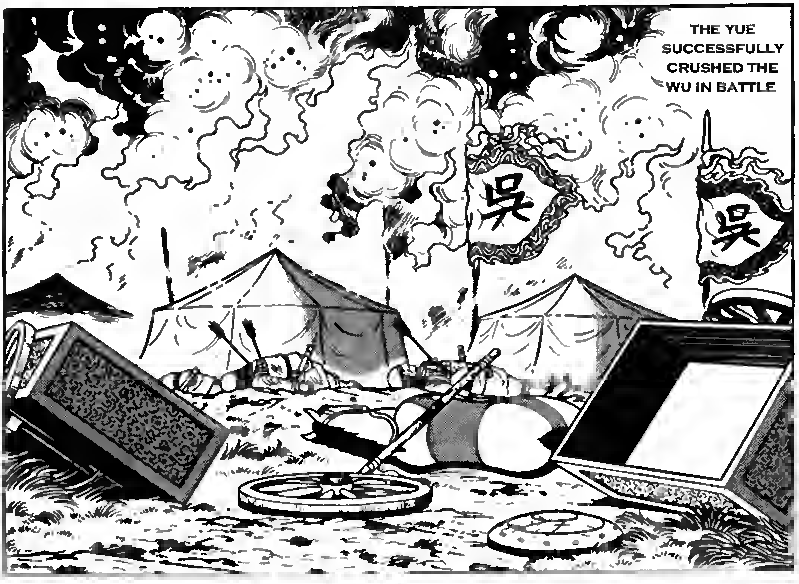

WU QUICKLY RESPONDED,
吳
吳

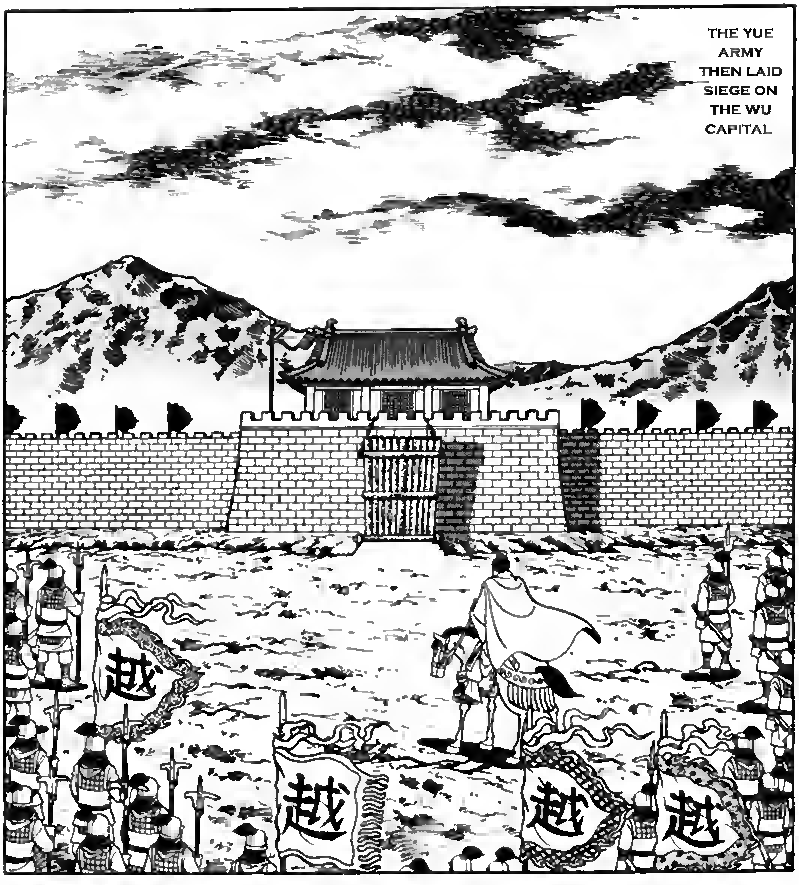
BY FACING THE YUE ARMY IN A LARGE BATTLE


HOWEVER, THE RECENT STRING OF UNSUCCESSFUL FOREIGN VENTURES HAD LEFT THE WU ARMY LACKING IN ELITE VETERANS.

THIS MADE ALL THE DIFFERENCE IN THIS CLIMACTIC SHOWDOWN.

43


THE YUE SUCCESSFULLY CRUSHED THE WU IN BATTLE.
吳
吳


THE YUE ARMY THEN LAID SIEGE ON THE WU CAPITAL
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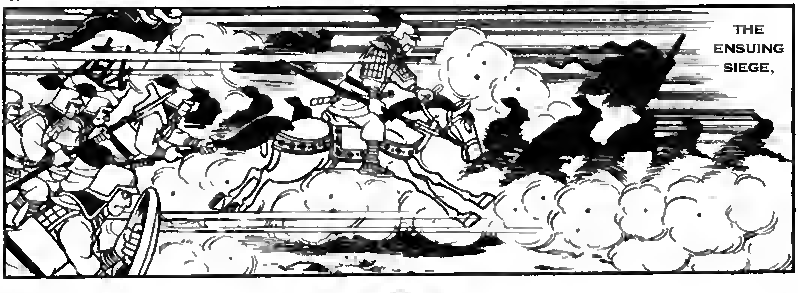
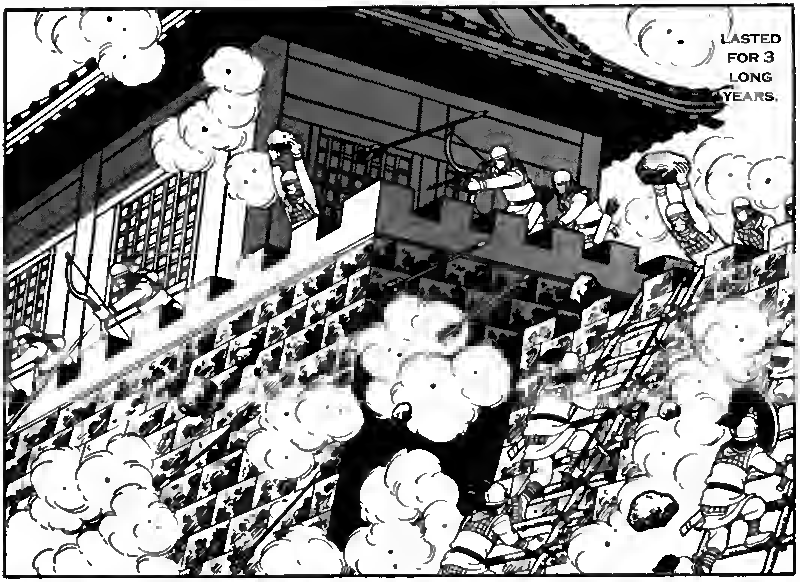
44


THE ENSUING SIEGE,

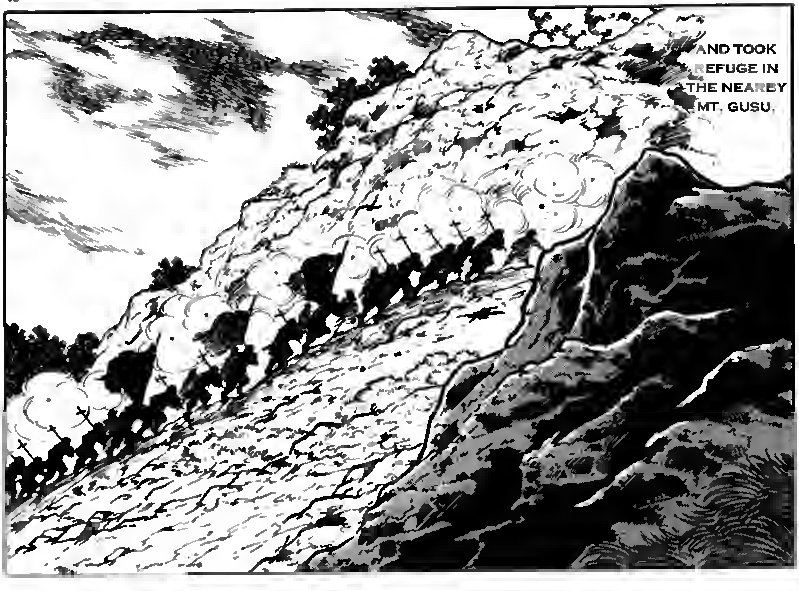

LASTED
FOR 3
LONG
YEARS.

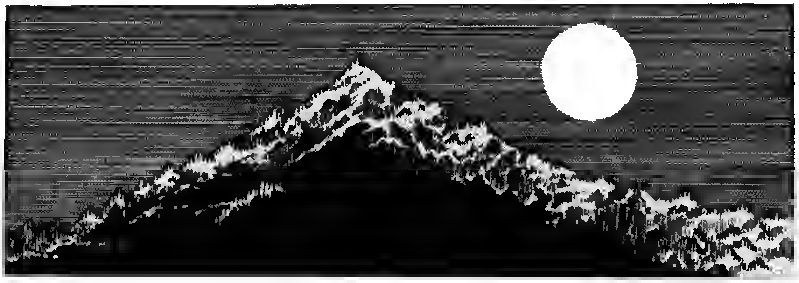
45

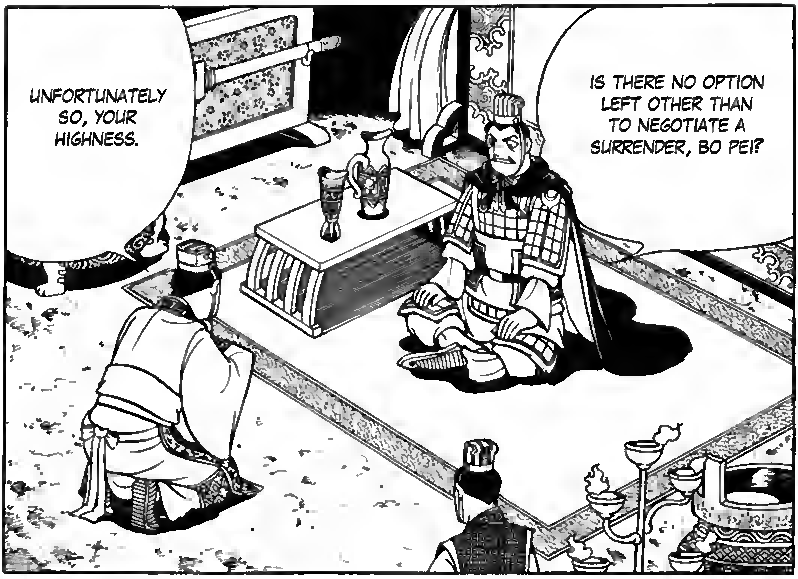
HAVING
REACHED
ITS LIMITS
THE CAPITAL
COULD HOLD
NO LONGER

FUCHAI FLED THE CAPITAL,

46

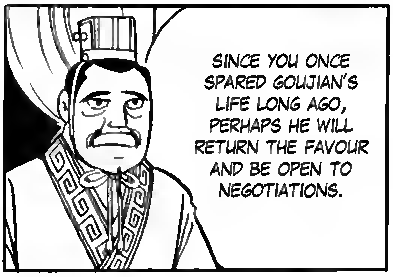

AND TOOK REFUGE IN THE NEAREY MT. GUSU.

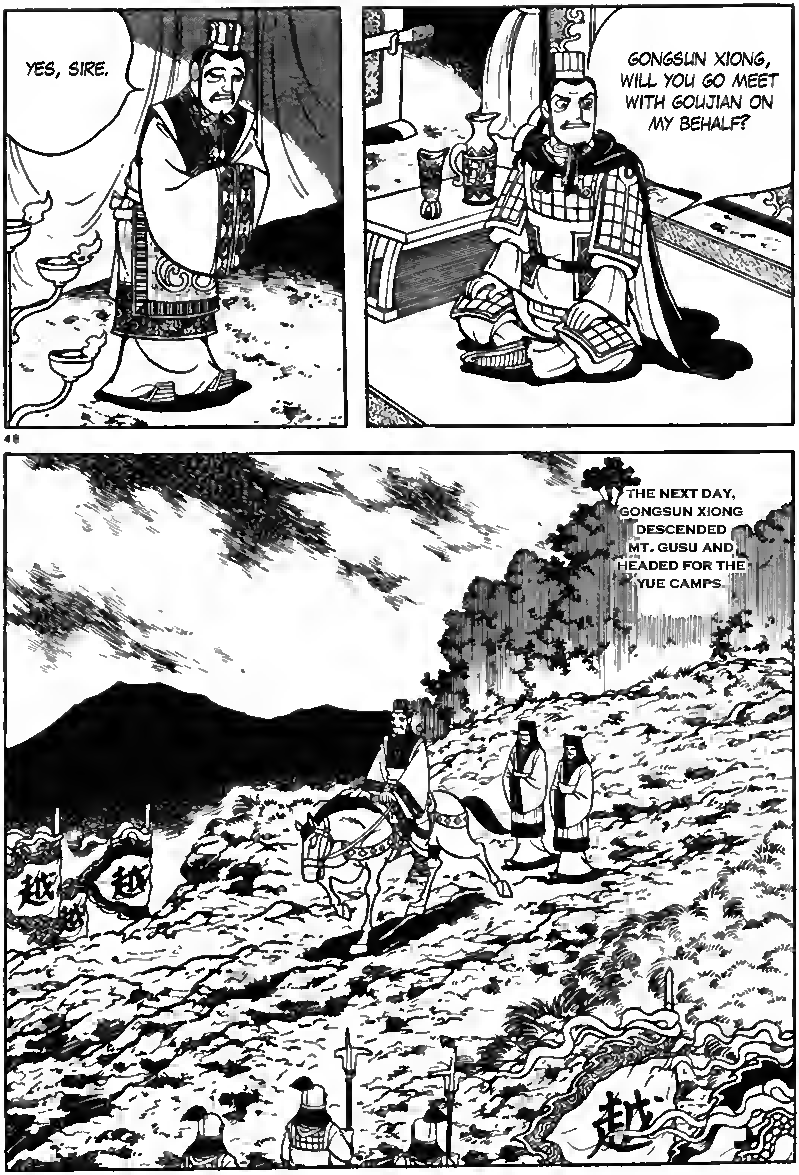



UNFORTUNATELY SO, YOUR HIGHNESS.
IS THERE NO OPTION LEFT OTHER THAN TO NEGOTIATE A SURRENDER, BO PEI?

47

I SEE...


SINCE YOU ONCE SPARED GOUJIAN'S LIFE LONG AGO, PERHAPS HE WILL RETURN THE FAVOUR AND BE OPEN TO NEGOTIATIONS.


YES, SIRE.
GONGSUN XIONG, WILL YOU GO MEET WITH GOUJIAN ON MY BEHALF?
48
THE NEXT DAY, GONGSUN XIONG DESCENDED MT. GUSU AND HEADED FOR THE YUE CAMPS.
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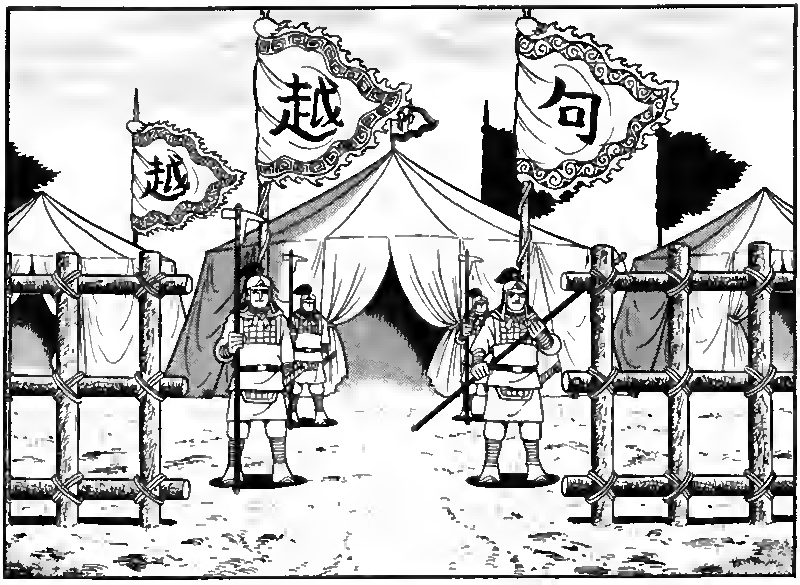
越
越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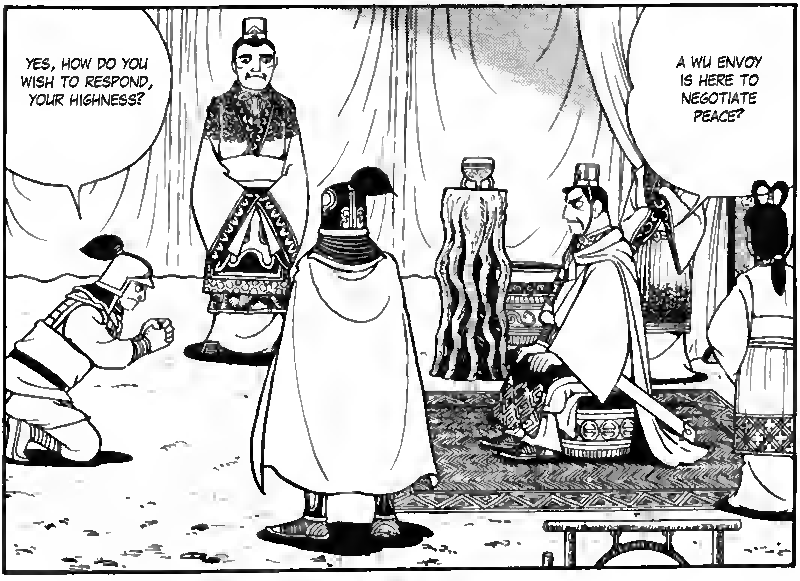
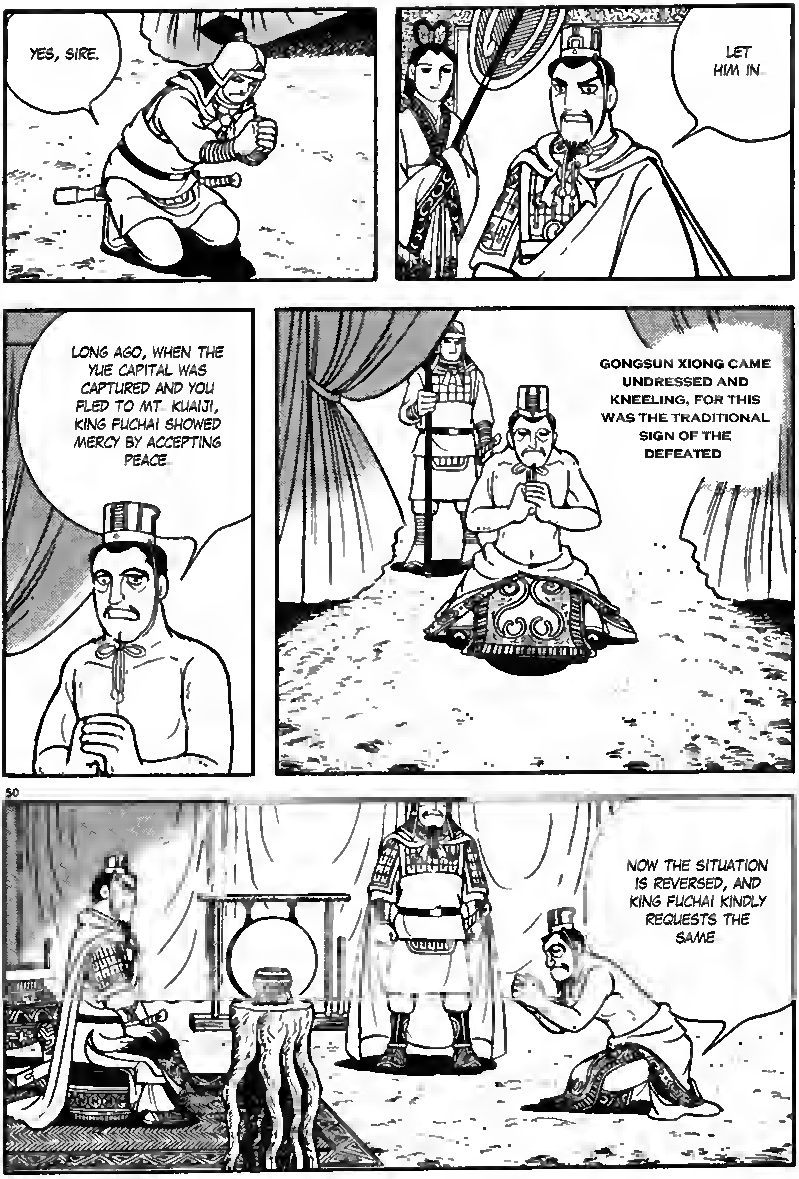
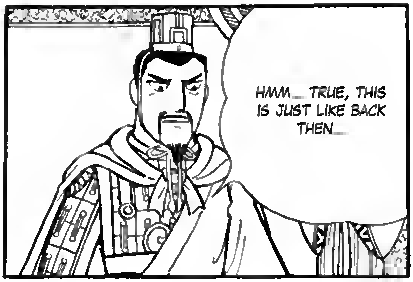
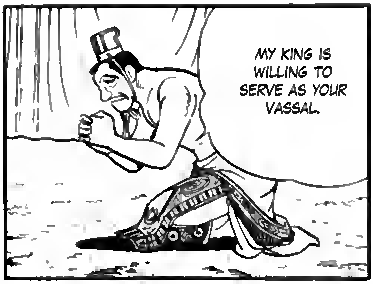
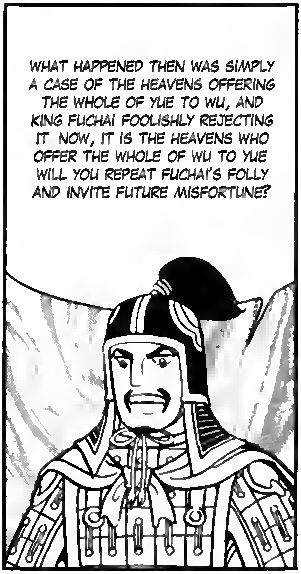
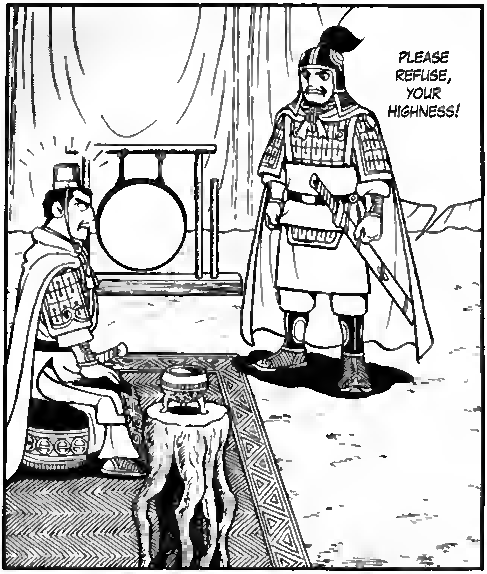

A WU ENVOY IS HERE TO NEGOTIATE PEACE?
YES, HOW DO YOU WISH TO RESPOND, YOUR HIGHNESS?


YES, SIRE.
LET HIM IN.
LONG AGO, WHEN THE YUE CAPITAL WAS CAPTURED AND YOU FLED TO MT. KUAIJI, KING FUCHAI SHOWED MERCY BY ACCEPTING PEACE.
GONGSUN XIONG CAME UNDRESSED AND KNEELING, FOR THIS WAS THE TRADITIONAL SIGN OF THE DEFEATED
50
NOW THE SITUATION IS REVERSED, AND KING FUCHAI KINDLY REQUESTS THE SAME


HMM... TRUE, THIS IS JUST LIKE BACK THEN...


MY KING IS WILLING TO SERVE AS YOUR VASSAL.

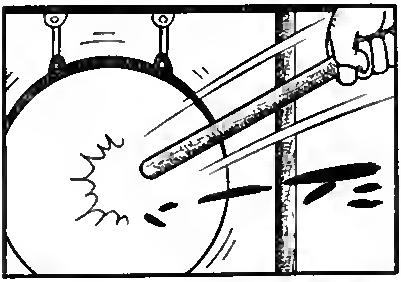

WHAT HAPPENED THEN WAS SIMPLY A CASE OF THE HEAVENS OFFERING THE WHOLE OF YUE TO WU, AND KING FUCHAI FOOLISHLY REJECTING IT. NOW, IT IS THE HEAVENS WHO OFFER THE WHOLE OF WU TO YUE. WILL YOU REPEAT FUCHAI'S FOLLY AND INVITE FUTURE MISFORTUNE?

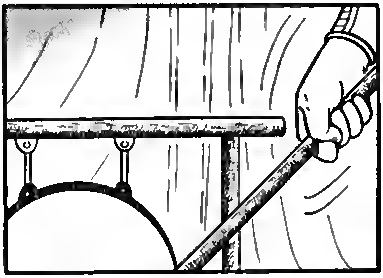

PLEASE REFUSE, YOUR HIGHNESS!

51

22 YEARS AGO, THE MIGHTY KING FUCHAI REJECTED HEAVENS' GIFT. NOW SEE THE STATE HE HAS BEEN REDUCED TO! DOES YOUR HIGHNESS WISH TO REPEAT HIS FATE!?

I AGREE BACK THEN, WU ZIXU SIMILARLY ADVISED FUCHAI TO REJECT PEACE BUT THE KING FOOLISHLY DISREGARDED THE ADVICE
THINK OF THE 22 YEARS OF ANGER AND DISGRACE YOU HAVE HAD TO HARBOUR!





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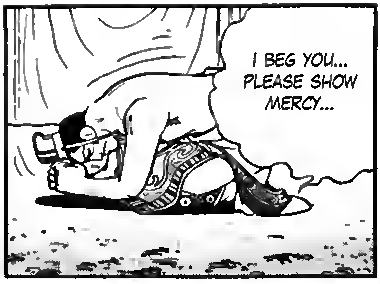
ON BEHALF OF THE KING, WE REJECT PEACE! LEAVE AT ONCE!



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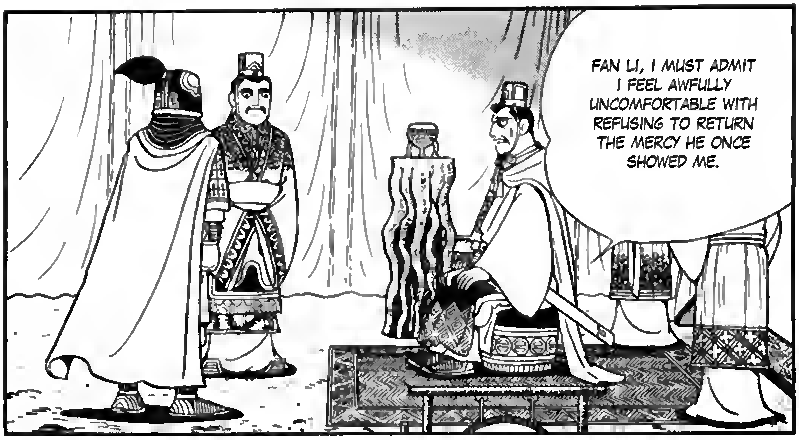
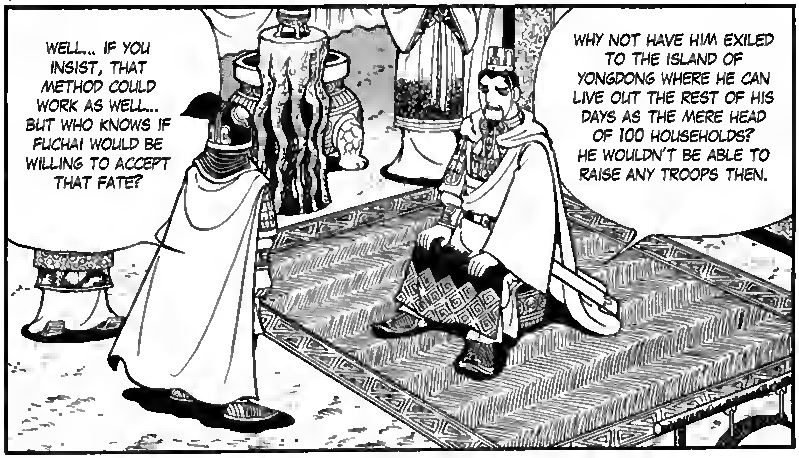

FAN LI, I MUST ADMIT I FEEL AWFULLY UNCOMFORTABLE WITH REFUSING TO RETURN THE MERCY HE ONCE SHOWED ME.

AS LONG AS I SEIZE WU FROM HIM, I DON'T EXACTLY SEE WHY I NEED TO TAKE HIS LIFE AS WELL...

54


WELL... IF YOU INSIST, THAT METHOD COULD WORK AS WELL... BUT WHO KNOWS IF FUCHAI WOULD BE WILLING TO ACCEPT THAT FATE?
WHY NOT HAVE HIM EXILED TO THE ISLAND OF YONGDONG WHERE HE CAN LIVE OUT THE REST OF HIS DAYS AS THE MERE HEAD OF 100 HOUSEHOLDS? HE WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO RAISE ANY TROOPS THEN.

I BELIEVE DIFFERENTLY, SIRE.
WELL, IT IS EITHER THAT OR DEATH... SURELY, HE WOULD ACCEPT?
YES, PLEASE DO SO.
IN ANY CASE, I WILL AT LEAST SEND THAT OFFER
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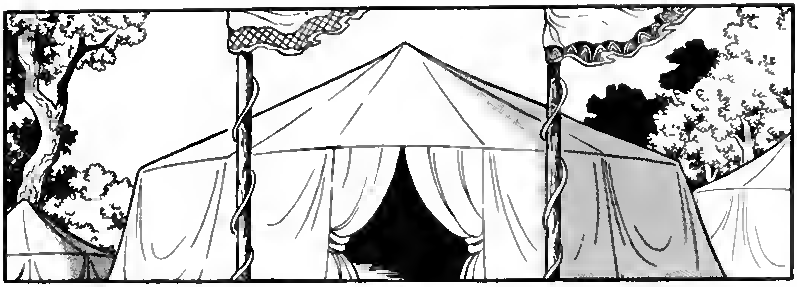
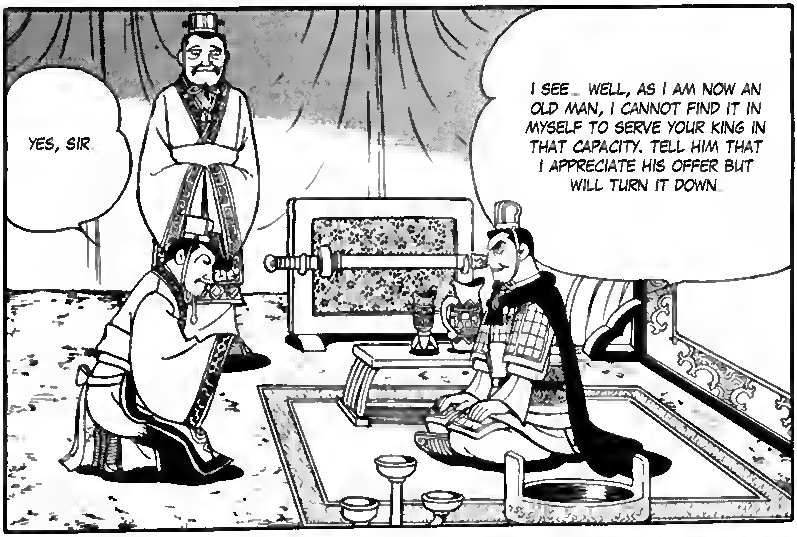
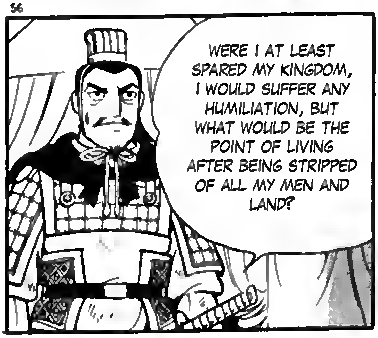
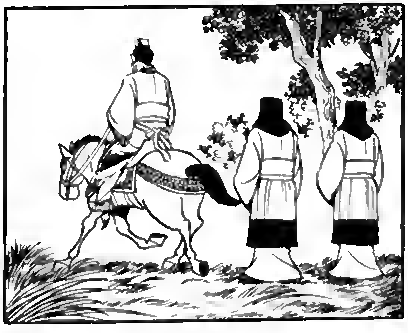
THUS, A YUE ENVOY WAS SENT THIS TIME TO MT. GUSU

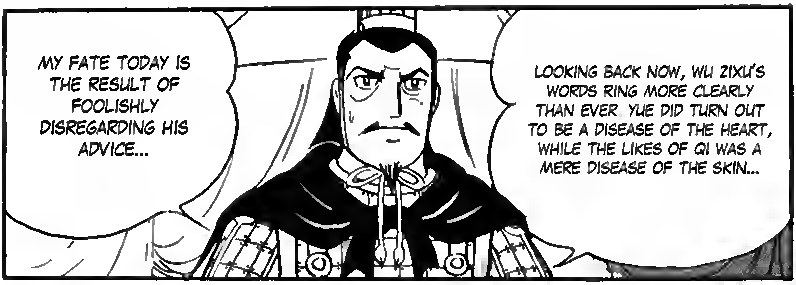



YES, SIR.
I SEE... WELL, AS I AM NOW AN OLD MAN, I CANNOT FIND IT IN MYSELF TO SERVE YOUR KING IN THAT CAPACITY. TELL HIM THAT I APPRECIATE HIS OFFER BUT WILL TURN IT DOWN.

56


WERE I AT LEAST SPARED MY KINGDOM, I WOULD SUFFER ANY HUMILIATION, BUT WHAT WOULD BE THE POINT OF LIVING AFTER BEING STRIPPED OF ALL MY MEN AND LAND?




MY FATE TODAY IS THE RESULT OF FOOLISHLY DISREGARDING HIS ADVICE...
LOOKING BACK NOW, WU ZIXU'S WORDS RING MORE CLEARLY THAN EVER. YUE DID TURN OUT TO BE A DISEASE OF THE HEART, WHILE THE LIKES OF QI WAS A MERE DISEASE OF THE SKIN...

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I WILL AT LEAST DIE WITH HONOUR BY COMMITTING SUICIDE. HOWEVER, AS I AM TOO ASHAMED TO FACE WU ZIXU IN THE AFTERLIFE, PLEASE COVER MY FACE...
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WITH THAT, FUCHAI SLIT HIS OWN THROAT. THE YEAR WAS 473 B.C.

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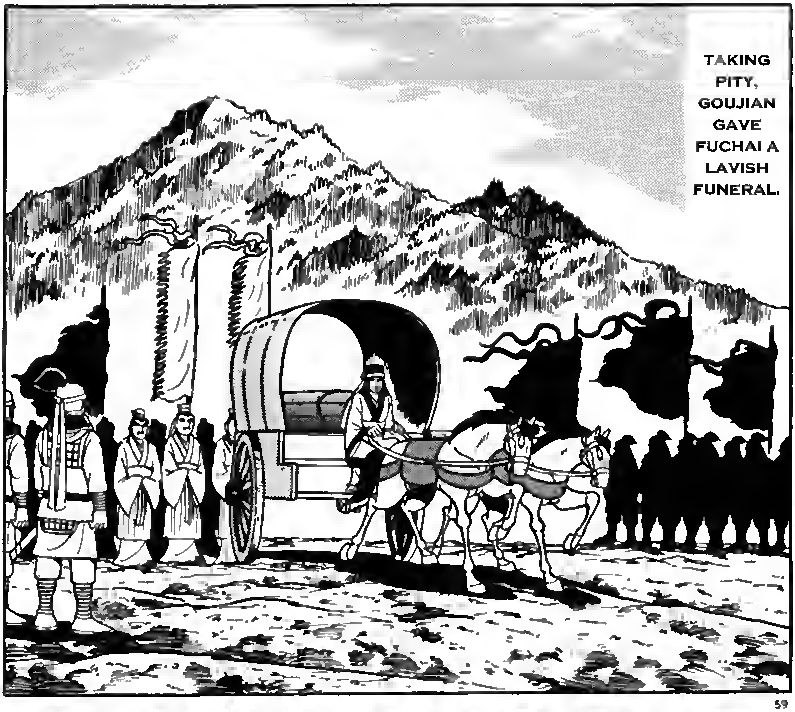
AS PER HIS WISHES, HIS FACE WAS COVERED OUT OF SHAME. THUS DID THE LINE OF WU KINGS COME TO AN END.


TAKING PITY, GOUJIAN GAVE FUCHAI A LAVISH FUNERAL.

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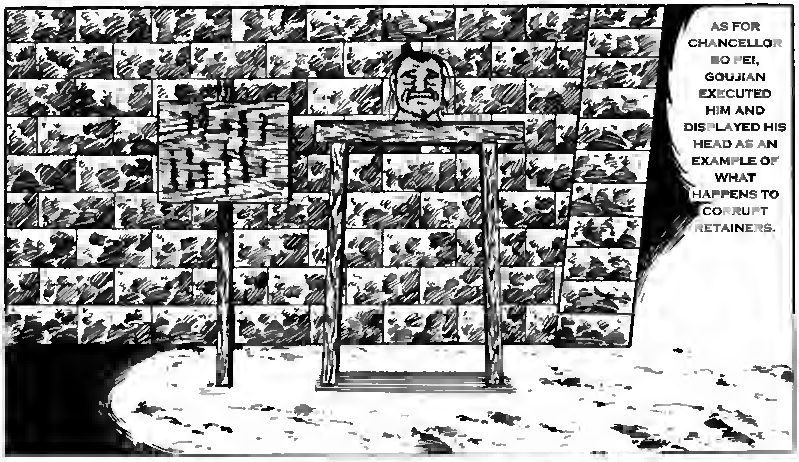
AS FOR CHANCELLOR BO PEI, GOUJIAN EXECUTED HIM AND DISPLAYED HIS HEAD AS AN EXAMPLE OF WHAT HAPPENS TO CORRUPT RETAINERS.

YUE THEN ANNEXED ALL OF WU'S LANDS AND ASPIRED TO EXPAND NORTH AS WU ONCE DID.
AS THE FALL OF WU EXEMPLIFIED, RELATIONS AMONG THE MANY STATES OF THE ZHOU REALM BECAME EVEN MORE CUT-THROAT. CHINA WAS NOW TRANSITIONING FROM THE SPRING AND AUTUMN PERIOD TO THE WARRING STATES PERIOD.

TRANSLATED BY HOX